

EXPLORING THE TEACHING APPROACHES UTILIZED BY EDUCATORS OF  
RETURNING ADULT STUDENTS ON SATELLITE CAMPUSES AND  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUSES: TO WHAT EXTENT DO FACULTY  
CHANGE THEIR TEACHING APPROACHES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE  
ADULT LEARNER?

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## ABSTRACT

# EXPLORING THE TEACHING APPROACHES UTILIZED BY EDUCATORS OF RETURNING ADULT STUDENTS ON SATELLITE CAMPUSES AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAMPUSES: TO WHAT EXTENT DO FACULTY CHANGE THEIR TEACHING APPROACHES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE ADULT LEARNER?

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There is a wealth of literature that provides faculty with effective teaching practices for educating returning adult students. Most of the literature focuses on online classes/institutions, community colleges, or the main campuses of four-year institutions. There is little to no literature, which explains what is actually taking place in the classroom on *satellite campuses* (also known as branch campuses, which consist almost entirely of returning adult students) of four-year institutions. With the projection of a continued increase in the number of returning adult students, it was important that this problem was addressed.

Through in-depth interviews, the following was explored with seventeen Behavioral Science faculty: the unique challenges faced by faculty on satellite campuses, perceptions of returning adult students, whether faculty changed their teaching

approaches with returning adult students, the teaching approaches utilized and if those teaching approaches were aligned with adult learning principles.

The findings indicated that the satellite campus environment is unique as far as the student population and skills required to navigate the various difficulties one might encounter as a faculty member. Faculty recognize the differences between traditional and returning adult students. They are conscious of the challenges that their returning adult students face and modify their teaching approaches in order to meet their needs. And regardless of how faculty learn how to adapt to the needs of the returning adult students and no matter what principles guide their thinking, faculty try to meet their students' needs. Additionally, whether faculty utilize formal course evaluations or gather feedback informally, feedback from students in any form hold value and can assist faculty in determining how to best modify their teaching approaches.

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my extraordinary mother, Evelyne Moore, who sacrificed so very much to ensure I had the tools I needed in life to be successful. Mom, you were my very first teacher and I still learn so very much from you every day. The faith you have in me has made me believe that I truly can accomplish anything.

To my husband, Maurice Allen, Jr., whose love gave me the strength to continue when this doctoral journey started to feel too long. I know I don't say it nearly enough, but I am truly grateful for all of the support you have provided. And to my two beautiful and brainy children, Lily and Preston. You two bring a joy to my life that I didn't know existed. I see nothing but greatness in your futures.

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Lastly, to all of the returning adult students all over the world, it's overwhelming, but it's worth it, persist. Your dedication inspires me and so many others.

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A.M.A.



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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

This qualitative study sought to determine to what extent, if at all, faculty change their teaching approaches when educating returning adult students and how their approaches and experiences align with adult learning principles. The researcher defines *faculty* as both full and part-time college/university educators of various ranks (e.g., lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, or professor). The term *returning adult students* refers to students age 25 or over who are either reentering undergraduate education after being away for a period of time or starting college for the first time.

This research employed a modified exploratory case study methodology. Participants of this study included 17 Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology) faculty members who teach returning adult students enrolled in a Bachelor's program at a four-year institution on a satellite campus located in the U.S. Faculty have either previously taught traditional students (undergraduates who are recent high school graduates) on a main campus or currently teach traditional students on a main campus (in addition to returning adult students on a satellite campus). It was ideal to utilize those who teach on satellite campuses because the student body on these campuses is if not completely, almost entirely made up of returning adult students. Due to the



limited number of participants who met the narrow criteria, the study was opened up to include Behavioral Science faculty members from community colleges as well.

Following the recommended structure of Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), this chapter begins with an overview of the background and context that frames the study. Following this is the problem statement, the statement of purpose, and accompanying research questions. Also included in this chapter is discussion around the research approach, the research perspectives, and the researcher's assumptions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the rationale and significance of this research study and definitions of some of the key terminology used (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 68).

### **Background and Context**

There has been an increase in the number of adults returning to school, or entering for the first time, even larger than the number of traditional students. According to Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), over the past decade, the number of students entering postsecondary institutions immediately following high school has progressively decreased, while the registration of nontraditional students has substantially increased. Statistics from the National Center of Education illustrate this fact (Radwin, Wine, Siegel, & Bryan, 2013). They found that from 2000 to 2010, the enrollment of students age 25 and over in degree-granting post-secondary institutions grew by 43%, while their younger counterparts only showed an increase of 34%. They have projected that from 2010 to 2020 those 25 and over will have a 20% increase in enrollment, while those under 25 will only show a rise of 11%. According to a more recent report from the U.S.

Department of Education (Radwin, Conzelmann, Nunnery, Lacy, Wu, Lew, Wine, & Siegel, 2018):

74% of all 2011–12 undergraduates had at least one nontraditional characteristic. Researchers generally consider nontraditional students to have the following characteristics: being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part time, and being employed full time (Brock 2010; Choy 2002; Horn 1996; Kim 2002; Taniguchi and Kaufman 2005). (p. 1)

Adults are returning to school for various reasons. Some adults want to advance career goals and increase their earning potential. However, others see education as a necessary step in transitioning from one life stage to another (Aslanian, 2001). No matter the reason for why the adult learner returns to college, adult education literature (Brookfield, 2013; King & Lawler, 2003; Knowles, 1980; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012) provides educators of adults with the resources needed to effectively teach this population by suggesting methods that would be best.

Knowles, the father of andragogy, opened up the world to the idea that children and adults have different learning needs. And his sentiments were echoed by many other adult learning theorists, e.g., Brookfield (2013), Merriam (2001), and Mezirow (1991). One of the unique aspects that the returning adult student brings to the classroom is life experience. According to Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, and Dirkx (2000), these life experiences are influenced by prior experiences such as: previous schooling, home life, or community responsibilities. And these experiences in turn influence the returning adult student's perception of how successful they will be in college. Since adults have had more life experiences, they are in many ways motivated differently than children. Adults are responsive to some external motivators (e.g., better job), but the most effective

motivators are internal (e.g., desire for increased job satisfaction). However, their motivation can be blocked by training and education that ignores adult learning principles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012).

Adult education literature states that instructors should recognize that adults have different learning styles and therefore instruction should be tailored to the characteristic ways that adults prefer to learn (Collins, 2004). For returning adults to be successful in the classroom they must be seen as knowledgeable learners (Hinkson & Butler, 2010). Therefore, the teaching approaches utilized may not be the methods used traditionally with younger students.

An example of a faculty member using traditional methods would be a professor with a large class where the instruction is largely lecture based with minimal student involvement. And students would be required to do a great deal of memorization. Research in the field of adult education shows that traditional methods such as those are inappropriate for adults and may also be inappropriate for young students (Lawler, 1991).

Traditional teaching methods can not only demean and infantilize returning adults, but they do not acknowledge the real-life experiences and knowledge that the students bring to the classroom. Adult learners benefit from methods that tap into their experience base as workers and in other aspects of life (Kazis et al., 2007). Educators might be advised to put aside the PowerPoint slides and instead use the power of project-based learning and various cooperative learning techniques to get the learners actively involved in constructing their own learning. According to Collins (2004), understanding the principles of adult learning can help educators become better facilitators of learning.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a wealth of adult education literature pointing to the disadvantages of using traditional teaching methods with returning adult students. And there is a great deal of literature that provides educators of adults with effective alternatives for teaching returning adult students. However, in my thorough search of various databases such as ERIC, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Premier (journal articles, eBooks, textbooks, etc.), there was little to no literature, which explained what is actually taking place in the classroom on the satellite campuses of four-year institutions. This study sought to shed light on what teaching approaches faculty members were utilizing in their classrooms with returning adult students. It was not known if they were sticking with the methods that had commonly been used with traditional students or if they were using methods that are aligned with adult learning principles as adult education literature suggests. With the projection of a continued increase in the number of returning adult students, it was important that this problem was addressed and that is what this study sought to do.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

This study was conducted to determine to what extent, if at all, faculty change their teaching approaches when educating returning adult students and how their approaches and experiences align with adult learning principles. This research explored the teaching approaches of 17 Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology) faculty members from 4 year institutions who either previously taught traditional students (student who recently graduated from high school) on a main campus

and currently teach returning adult students (adults age 25 and over returning to college or attending for the first time) on a satellite campus (also known as a remote or branch campus) or who are currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus.

Behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) faculty were selected because their course content is such that an educator can teach using more nontraditional methods (e.g., group discussion, role play, simulation exercises), whereas faculty who teach subjects such as biology or math may require more traditional methods (e.g., memorization and lecture). It was also helpful to analysis to narrow down the sample down to one discipline being behavioral science. To carry out the purpose of this research, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What differences (if any) do participants perceive between traditional and returning adult students?
2. To what extent do participants change their teaching approaches to meet the needs of the returning adult student?
  - a. How do participants learn to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student?
  - b. What principles (if any) do participants draw on when trying to meet the needs of the returning adult student?

### **Research Approach**

This researcher studied the teaching approaches of 17 behavioral science (psychology, sociology, and anthropology) faculty members from various satellite

campuses throughout the United States as well as faculty who reported that they taught returning adults students at a community college. Ten faculty members were from the satellite campuses of four-year institutions, while seven taught at a community college. The faculty members were all educators of returning adult students who are either pursuing a bachelor's degree in behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) or an associate degree. Data was collected via qualitative research methods.

Semi-structured interviews were the main research method utilized. The information that was obtained from these 17 in-depth individual interviews formed the basis for the overall findings of this study. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed, all digital recordings were deleted, and all identifiable information was removed. As a result, all interview transcripts were confidential.

The analysis of data was guided by the study's conceptual framework. The coding categories were created and refined on an ongoing basis throughout the course of the study.

### **The Researcher**

The researcher is employed as a full-time Psychology faculty member at a community college, but this study did not focus on a case study of one university. Instead, it drew from a number of different campuses from around the United States. Currently, the researcher's classes are mostly made up of a mixture of both returning adults and traditional students with two classes (evening and weekend) that are made up almost entirely of returning adult students.

The researcher has served as an educator of adults at various organizations for nearly 15 years. This experience includes teaching college courses to traditional students on the main campus of a four-year institution as well as teaching returning adult students on satellite campuses of various four-year institutions. The researcher has developed and conducted professional development trainings. In addition to professional experience, the researcher is currently a doctoral candidate in an adult learning & leadership program. Thus, the researcher brings to the inquiry process knowledge of adult learning principles and practical experience as a psychology faculty member on a satellite campus and at a community college.

Although the researcher understood that the aforementioned knowledge and experience served as a vital asset to the overall research study that was conducted, it was also apparent that this same experience could have led to possible biasing in the interpretation of findings. Therefore, the researcher listed all held assumptions below. In addition, the researcher served as an Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator for a university. Major duties included facilitating workshops on research ethics and reviewing all research proposals submitted by university faculty, graduate students, and outside researchers. As a result, the researcher takes research ethics very seriously. Therefore, procedural safeguards were taken to address subjectivity and strengthen the credibility of the research.

### **Assumptions**

Based on the researcher's experience and background as a faculty member on various satellite campuses, the following four assumptions were made regarding this study:

1. The various barriers that the returning adult students bring with them into the college classroom make it challenging for faculty to teach them. This assumption was guided by adult learning literature that says adults face unique barriers when they return to the classroom such as: difficulty adjusting to reentry to the classroom, conflicts between education and personal responsibilities, and lack of adequate and/or appropriate campus support services (Day, Lovato, Tull, & Ross-Gordon, 2011; Ritt, 2008).
2. Faculty members attempt to address the challenges of teaching returning adults by use of various strategies including: flexibility around assignment deadlines, incorporating more in-class assignments, and creating a classroom environment where returning adults can reflect on their personal experiences (Graham et al., 2000; Knowles et al., 2012). This assumption is based on this researcher's experience as an educator of returning adult students on college satellite campuses.
3. Faculty members do not draw on adult learning principles when trying to address the challenges of teaching returning adults, instead they draw on natural instincts and suggestions from colleagues. This assumption is based on the premise that in general, applicants are not required to have a background in adult education to be



hired as a faculty member, therefore most faculty who teach returning adults are not familiar with adult learning principles.

4. Faculty evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching approaches with returning adult students through methods commonly used such as: exams, presentations, papers, and in-class assignments. This assumption is based on this researcher's experience as a faculty member.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Satellite campuses commonly house returning adult students. The researcher believed that the faculty members that teach on these campuses face different challenges than those located on the main campus, not only because they are educating a different student population with unique learning needs, but also because support services tend to be lacking on these campuses. Therefore, the rationale for this study derived from the researchers' desire to reveal: challenges faced by satellite campus faculty, whether the faculty on satellite campuses change their teaching approaches when educating returning adult students (vs. traditional students and why), what teaching approaches are utilized, and to what extent these teaching approaches are aligned with adult learning principles. According to O'Brien (2007),

non-traditional student populations located at satellite campuses have differing academic, social, psychological, and validation needs from their on-campus counterparts. Universities need to explore this diversity of nature and implement retention tools to address this diversity (p. 4).

There is a wealth of literature available that explains what teaching approaches are most effective with returning adult students (Brookfield, 2013; Knowles, 1980;

Knowles et al., 2012). There is also a great deal of literature that discusses the consequences of using traditional teaching methods with returning adult (i.e., nontraditional) students (e.g., Lawler, 1991; Knowles et al., 2012; Tice, 1997). However, there is very little literature that explores exactly what those who are teaching returning adults on a satellite campus do in the classroom. There has been a steady increase in adults going back to college or starting for the first time and with that a steady growth in satellite campuses where these students are educated (e.g., Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; NCES, 2012). However, the literature either focuses on adults attending community colleges, online courses, or on the main campus of four-year colleges with traditional students. The researcher believed that this study would not only add to adult education literature, but also provide a window into the world of teaching on a satellite campus and suggest a range of possible teaching approaches for faculty members who educate returning adult students. This study also has the potential to benefit administrators of satellite campuses and the returning adult students who attend classes on these campuses.

### **Definitions**

**Faculty**—This includes both part-time and full-time teachers at a college or university. The ranks of the teachers will vary from lecturer/instructor to full professor.

**Nontraditional teaching methods**—Methods of educating students that are aligned with adult learning principles and Knowles' list of assumptions of andragogy.

**Returning adult student**—An adult student age 25 or over who is either reentering undergraduate education after being away for a period of time or starting college for the

first time. These students are also referred to as adult learners, mature students, reentry students, and nontraditional students.

**Satellite Campus**—Campuses that are affiliated with, but not physically connected to the main campus of a college/university. Satellite campuses are commonly geared towards nontraditional students, have fewer resources, house fewer faculty members, and are located in office buildings. This is also referred to as an: urban, branch, remote, regional, or site campus (Table 1).

**Teaching approaches**—The pedagogical methods that are utilized by faculty in their classes to educate students.

**Traditional teaching methods:** Methods of educating students that are aligned with Knowles' assumptions of pedagogy.

Table 1

*Satellite Campus Description*

<b>Requirements</b>
<p>A branch program (if it is part of the main business school) needs to meet the same standards as far as student and faculty quality (Kiley, 2012).</p> <p>According to the Accreditation Review Council on Education in Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (2010), satellite campus students must have access to all equivalent human, physical, and financial resources (as main campus students).</p> <p>The Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (2010) states that a satellite campus must meet six specific requirements: 1) it must be licensed or otherwise approved by the appropriate state regulatory body. 2) It offers only one complete program of study. 3) It falls within main or non-main campus authority. 4) It is located at a different address of that of the main or non-main campus. 5) It provides all services that are offered at the main or non-main campus. 6) It maintains permanent student records at the main or non-main campus that are readily accessible to the satellite classroom and students.</p>
<b>Characteristics</b>
<p>In a study conducted by Lynch and Bishop-Clark (1998) they found that on the main campus students over age 25 made up only 5% of the population, while on the two branch campuses students over age 25 made up almost 40% of the population.</p> <p>The student population on satellite campuses generally includes working adult students returning to school to complete undergraduate degrees (Kiley, 2012).</p> <p>According to O'Brien (2007) an urban campus: (1) is located in an urban area, (2) draws a large portion of their undergraduate students from urban areas and from neighboring areas, (3) provides programs to make postsecondary education more accessible to the residents of the urban areas, and (4) reflects an increasing number of older students.</p> <p>According to Hoyt and Howell (2012), satellite campuses compared to the main campus tend to have predominantly adjunct faculty, a smaller class size and therefore more instructor interaction. They offer fewer (only once a week) classes, but longer (2.5 hour) classes rather than shorter class periods two or three times a week.</p> <p>Due to its' smaller size, the satellite campus' organizational structure is much simpler than that of the main campus (Bridgen, 2014).</p> <p>Satellite campuses accommodate increased student enrolment and fulfill the community's desire for campuses closer to home (K. Epps, Epps, &amp; Campbell, 2015).</p>

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

In order to provide a foundation for understanding the importance of faculty using teaching approaches that are aligned with adult learning principles, one must first fully understand who the returning adult student is and their reasoning for returning to school. The researcher used this literature review to discuss: early perspectives of the adult student, various theories of adult learning, who the returning adult student is, their reasons for returning to school, and strategies for how educators of adults can teach them effectively. This literature assisted the researcher in developing the conceptual framework as well as determine what to include in the interview protocol. Databases searched include: ERIC, Education Full Text, eBooks, ProQuest, and PsycINFO. Keywords used were: adult development, adult learning theory, barriers, nontraditional students, Malcolm Knowles, andragogy, Mezirow, returning adult students, satellite campus, and Stephen Brookfield.

## **Topic I: Meeting the Learning Needs of the Returning Adult Student**

### **Evolving Perspectives**

Kasworm (1990) conducted a review of past research perspectives of adult undergraduates in higher education. The article states:

Some of the studies presumed that there was a covert, if not overt, prejudice towards the adult student. Other studies implied that there was a lack of awareness by collegiate personnel; thus, the findings of these studies would redirect the collegiate environment in meeting the identified needs of the adult student. It was assumed that collegiate institutions did not recognize the unique difficulties and needs of the adult student. Studies attempted to gain greater insights into the specific dynamics of role conflicts as they might influence the adult in a student role. Differences in role conflict were examined for women reentry students and their families (Hooper, 1979), between male and female reentry students (Gilbert, Manning, & Ponder, 1980; Gilbert & Holahan, 1982), and between professional and nonprofessional women groupings (Beutell & O'Hare, 1987). Studies reported more significant role conflict among female reentry students than among male reentry students. There were also differing role conflicts when comparing professional and nonprofessional women in student roles and when comparing family coping styles in relation to the wife/mother's student role involvement. (p. 361)

Like Kasworm (1990), Lynch and Bishop-Clark's (1998) reviewed early literature to examine the past perceptions of adult students. They found the following:

Groves and Groves (1980) argued that faculty had little experience with older adults and Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) reported faculty would be reluctant to teach courses geared for adults. Some noted that faculty felt this group was anti-intellectual, overly practical, and resistant to change (David, 1979; Hughes, 1983). Faculty feared that adults would be on the fringes of academic life due to the demands on their time (Holtzclaw, 1980) and that they would lower academic standards because they lacked the requisite skills necessary for college learning (Miller, 1989). Kasworm (1990) reports that faculty members' fears of decline in academic standards were perpetual, and research findings substantiate that professors do not alter their expectations or change their teaching styles in response to the participation of adults in their classrooms. (p. 218)

Lynch and Bishop-Clark (1998) conducted a research study where they compared the returning adult student's experience on a main campus to their experience on a

satellite campus (of the same university). Their results suggested that earlier works that showed faculty with negative attitudes towards teaching returning adult students appeared to be unfounded at least in environments where adults were a significant percentage of the campus population. This sentiment was echoed in a more recent study conducted by Brinthaup and Eady (2014) with 171 faculty members from community colleges and regional universities. They examined faculty members' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors towards returning adult students and they also found that their participants held positive attitudes and perceptions of their returning adult students. According to Brinthaup and Eady (2014),

The colleges used here have large percentages of adult learners and a wide variety of class schedule offerings and course delivery options for those students. We would expect that the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of teachers in institutions with fewer adult learners are likely to be less favorable than those reported in this study. (p. 139)

### **The Returning Adult Student**

There has been a significant increase in the number of adults returning to school (or entering for the first time) even larger than the number of traditional students. There has been a decline, however, in the proportion of younger people attaining an undergraduate degree. For more than three decades unusually large numbers of returning adults have enrolled (Ewell, 2005). According to Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), over the past decade, the number of students entering postsecondary institutions immediately following high school has progressively decreased, while the registration of nontraditional students has substantially increased. Statistics from the NCES (2012) illustrate this fact. The number of full-time adult learners (25 and over) is growing, increasing more than 8% to over 2.5 million in 2011 (the last year for which statistics are

available) from 2.3 million in 2009. They found that from 2000 to 2010, the enrollment of students age 25 and over in degree-granting post-secondary institutions grew by 43%, while their younger counterparts only showed an increase of 34%. They have projected that from 2010 to 2020 those 25 and over will have a 20% increase in enrollment, while those under 25 will only show a rise of 11%. According to a more recent report from the U.S. Department of Education (2015),

74% of all 2011–12 undergraduates had at least one nontraditional characteristic. Researchers generally consider nontraditional students to have the following characteristics: being independent for financial aid purposes, having one or more dependents, being a single caregiver, not having a traditional high school diploma, delaying postsecondary enrollment, attending school part time, and being employed full time (Brock 2010; Choy 2002; Horn 1996; Kim 2002; Taniguchi and Kaufman 2005). (p. 1)

Robert J. Hansen, the chief executive of the University Professional and Continuing Education Association estimates that 700 four-year campuses offer continuing education programs for older students (25 and over) to earn a bachelor's degree (Zipkin, 2014).

According to Ritt (2008), adult students have barriers that can make it very difficult to return to college. These barriers can be *personal*, *professional*, or *institutional*. Some examples of *personal* barriers are: family commitments, lack of childcare, or general fear of returning to school. A *professional* barrier would be relevant to adult students who are employed. An example is not receiving any form of tuition reimbursement from their employer, which can cause them to bear a financial burden. An *institutional* barrier deals more with the actual college/university than the student himself. An example of an institutional barrier is the high cost of education (i.e. rising costs of tuition and fees). On a daily basis, educators of adults are expected to openly



acknowledge these and other barriers and work with adult students to provide options and alternatives.

Kenner and Weinerman (2011) stated that there are three main groups of students that make up adult learners returning to school: (a) workers who have lost their jobs because of the recession of 2008 and who require developmental coursework to refresh their entry level collegiate skills, (b) veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq who delayed their education to serve in the armed forces, and, (c) adults who have just completed their GED and are moving onto higher education classes. Experts in the field have also found that returning adult students include: career changers, those who deferred college earlier, and those who want to be role models for younger family members (Zipkin, 2014).

In a research study conducted by Day, Lovato, Tull, and Ross-Gordon (2011), they asked faculty to provide characteristics of adult learners.

The participants in this study perceived adult students as tenacious—being more committed to their education, more focused, and harder working in their classes. One participant stated that the older learners he had in class are more persistent, more tenacious, and more dedicated because if they were not, they would not have come back to school. Participants also talked about adult students' abilities to multitask, to juggle their many life roles in addition to their student role. They also perceived that while adult learners are typically prepared to devote themselves to study, specific study skills and confidence in the classroom might be lacking, and thus a final subtheme emerged related to the duality of adult learners' preparedness. (p. 79)

### **Reasons Adults Return to School**

Adults are motivated to return to school for various reasons. According to Deutsch and Schmertz (2011) some adults want to advance career goals and increase their earning potential. However, others see education as a necessary step in transitioning

from one life stage to another (Aslanian, 2001). Dayton (2005) noted three different reasons that adults are returning to school. The reasons explained were: (a) the changing job market; (b) welfare reform; and (c) changing family structures. The changing job market refers to the diminishing of low-end jobs, which means adults who could previously support themselves with a high school diploma now find their marketable skills limited. The welfare reform refers to the restricting of assistance, which has left struggling workers with dwindling aid. And the changing family structure has resulted in a rising number of families reliant upon a single parent. And as a result of one or possibly all three of these factors several adults are returning to academia not due to choice, but out of necessity.

In a research study conducted by Parks, Evans, and Getch (2013), which focused on older students (specifically baby boomers) returning to a traditional university, adult learners' (25 and over) motivations for returning to school was discussed. The researchers organized the adult learner's motivations into three subgroups. The three subgroups were: goal oriented, activity oriented, and learner oriented. The goal-oriented learner pursues education as an instrumental means of achieving external objectives, such as taking a course to either get a job or a promotion. The activity-oriented learner returns to school for social reasons, such as the desire to be around young people. The learning-oriented learner maintains a commitment to lifelong learning and therefore sees college education as having value in and of itself.

## **Topic II: Adult Learning Theory and the Needs of the Adult Learner**

According to English (2005), adult development allows us to better understand how changes in adulthood intersect with adult learner needs and interests because learning is often the way adults deal with change. The best-known adult learning theoretical framework comes from Malcolm Knowles. Knowles (1970) proposed a framework of adult learning, which he felt was different than pre-adult schooling. This theory became known as andragogy, which means the art and science of helping adults learn (Clapper, 2010).

Knowles (1980) distinguished the assumptions of pedagogy from those of andragogy. According to Knowles, pedagogy's assumptions are: (a) the learner has a dependent role; (b) the learner's experience has little value as a resource for learning; (c) the learner is prepared to learn what they're told they must learn; (d) learners perceive learning as being a process of accumulating subject matter; and (e) the learner is primarily extrinsically motivated to learn. In comparison, andragogy was a model that was born from the growth of knowledge about adult learning and had an alternative list of assumptions. According to Knowles, the assumptions of andragogy are:

- (1) It is a natural part of the process of maturation of an individual to want (need, even) to move from dependency toward increasing self-responsibility and self-directedness. (2) As individuals grow and develop they accumulate an increasing reservoir of experience that is a rich resource for learning. (3) People become ready to learn whatever they need to know or be able to do in order to cope more effectively with changing life tasks and life problems. (4) Adults tend to be problem-centered or task centered in their orientation to learning; they learn better, therefore, when learning experiences are organized around life situations than when they are presented in terms of subject units. (5) Although adults respond to externally induced motivators, the more potent motivations to learn come from internal needs to grow and develop toward self-fulfillment. (pp. 48-49)

From these assumptions, Knowles proposed a program planning model for designing, implementing, and evaluating educational experiences with adults (Merriam, 2001).

According to Clapper (2010), Knowles received criticism for assuming that all adult learners learn in the same way, ignoring systems of oppression and the effects of culture on learning and development. Nonetheless, Knowles did address motivation as a form of internal discipline in understanding why an adult learner approaches learning (Knowles, 1980).

McClusky (1963) developed a theory margin. Similar to Knowles, McClusky provided a theory that's overall goal was to notify educators of adults how to meet the needs of adult learners. McClusky's theory observed a balance between the "power" and the "load" as one grows older and moves through adulthood. The load refers to what the adult carries while the power describes what is available to the adult in order to carry the load. The margin therefore is the relationship between the load and power (Clapper, 2010). McClusky's (1970) formula for margin suggests that the greater the power in relationship to the load, the more margin will be available. The load-to power ratio changes and adjusts throughout the adult years with changes in any of the power or load factors such that "margin can be increased by reducing load, or increasing power" (McClusky, 1970, p. 83).

One of Knowles' assumptions refers to the adult learner being capable of directing their own learning (Merriam, 2001). Tough's research with Canadian adult learners echoes this assumption. Tough found through his study that 90% of his research participants had engaged in an average of 100 hours of self-planned learning projects in

the previous year. This led to the adult-specific concept of self-directed learning (SDL), which is learning that is widespread and occurs as part of an adult's everyday life. It is systematic and does not depend on an instructor or a classroom (English, 2005). This contribution from Tough has played a major part in understanding and defining adult learning.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory capitalizes on Knowles's suggestion that adult learners possess a richer base of experiences that are brought into the learning environment (Clapper, 2010).

Rather than focusing on the learner as andragogy and to a large extent self-directed learning do, transformational learning is about the cognitive process of meaning making. It is particularly an adult learning theory because transformational learning is dependent on adult life experiences and a more mature level of cognitive functioning than found in childhood. (p. 44)

Transformative learning focuses on changing what we know, a process which often involves three key concepts: life experiences, critical reflection, and the connection between transformative learning and development (Clapper, 2010). According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken for granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove truer or justified to guide action. According to Mezirow, the transformative learning process, begins with (a) disorienting dilemma—a life experience that cannot be accommodated by one's present worldview; (b) self-examination of the situation causing the discomfort, exploration, and perhaps new ways of explaining the situation; and (c) development of new ways of thinking about the situation; followed by (d) trying on the new role or

assimilation. Transformative learning occurs when the learners change their frames of reference to match this new way of thinking, which occurs through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991).

Though other theories of adult learning exist, andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformational learning have come to define much of adult learning today (English, 2005). The following section will describe the returning adult student and how to best meet their learning needs. In explaining how to address their learning needs best, there will also be a discussion of what teaching approaches educators of adults should avoid.

### **Topic III: Effective Teaching Approaches for Educating Returning Adult Students**

Higher education continues to experience a steady rise in participation from returning adult students; therefore, educators will need models that best fit with them (Chen, 2014). According to King and Lawler (2003), in many cases faculty have had little or no training in working with adult learners. They themselves come from diverse backgrounds, educational experiences, and cultural contexts. Their charge is to promote learning and change in the adults they teach. They work in complex organizations and may find support for their endeavors in their organizations or they may find that they are on their own as they set out to teach and train their adult students.

According to Brookfield (2013) when it comes to adult learners, it's plainly ludicrous to talk about teaching adults as if all adults across the planet represent a monolithic, generic category for which we can generate standardized techniques. There are several variables involved that need to be considered such as: readiness for learning, racial identity, previous experiences, and learning style. However, Brookfield does agree

with the view of several other adult learning theorists (e.g., Knowles, Kolb, Mezirow) that one aspect of the adult learner that is generally true for all is life experience, just from the idea that the longer you are here (on this planet) the more experiences you accumulate. Much of what will be discussed in this section of the literature view focuses on how the life experiences of the returning adult student can be utilized by educators of adults.

Adults have special needs as learners and these needs should be taken into consideration when planning training for adults. When adults participate in a positive learning experience that follows the six assumptions of andragogy presented by Knowles, they are more likely to retain what they have learned and apply it in their work environment (Ota, DiCarlo, Burts, Laird, & Gioe, 2006). In 1999 the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL; Tell, 1999) partnered with the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) to conduct a yearlong benchmarking study of best practices in adult learning. The study consisted of a six-step research process. The steps were: (a) forming a benchmarking group. (b) planning the research project. (c) administering a screening survey to identify best practice institutions. (d) best practice site selection. (e) site visits. (f) best practice findings.

In the first step a benchmarking group was formed. The group was made up of: representatives from CAEL, the subject matter experts from Canadian and U.S. higher education institutions, and benchmarking specialists from APQC (Tell, 1999). In the second step the research project was planned. The group that was formed during the first step met several times to: identify the scope of the project, nominate best practice institutions to be surveyed, and design the initial written screening survey. During the

third step 63 higher education institutions in Europe and North America were nominated as potential best practice institutions. They were sent the survey via postal mail. The survey consisted of 33 items and asked about the best practices in the research areas of informational issues, access and equity, academic and social integration, and career integration. Of the 63 contacted, 33 responded to the mailing by the deadline (Tell, 1999).

During the fourth step the subject matter experts analyzed the survey answers, which were blinded in order for them to remain anonymous (Tell, 1999). Then they selected six best practice higher education institutions in a process that took one day. Of the six institutions, five are in the U.S. and one is in Canada. At the fifth step of the research process, site visits were made to the six institutions selected. The screening survey asked what the best practices were, but the site visits provided the “how” and “why.” The visit was a daylong of data collection with faculty, staff, and students at each institution. An interview guide structured the day and the interviews and discussions were transcribed. This became part of a data record for later analysis along with individual notes, documents, and materials for each institution (Tell, 1999).

The sixth and final step consisted of the subject matter experts reading and analyzing all the data (Tell, 1999). Then each of them individually proposed best practice themes. After further analysis of the data and themes, they distilled them into an initial set of findings. The overarching theme of the key findings was: The Adult Learning Focused Institution of Higher Education has a culture in which adult centered learning, sensitivity to learners’ needs, flexibility, and communication drive institutional practice (Tell, 1999).



The aforementioned theme and the research findings led to the CAEL's development of the Eight Principles of Effectiveness for Serving Adult Learners (Tell, 1999); embedded in this list are ways to address the previously mentioned barriers faced by returning adult students. The eight principles are:

- *Outreach.* The institution conducts outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers of time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities.
- *Life and career planning.* The institution addresses adult learners' life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals.
- *Financing.* The institution uses an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility.
- *Assessment of learning outcomes.* The institution defines and assesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by adult learners both from the curriculum and from life-work experience in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor.
- *Teaching-learning process.* The institution's faculty uses multiple methods of instruction (including experiential- and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills.
- *Student support systems.* The institution assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students' capacities to become self-directed, lifelong learners.

- *Technology*. The institution uses information technology to provide relevant and timely information to enhance the learning experience.
- *Strategic partnerships*. The institution engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners. (Tell, 1999, p. 76)

According to Kenner and Weinerman (2011), by understanding what makes adult learners different from traditional students, educators can provide specific tools that help adult learners integrate into the college or university environment and increase their chances for success. Returning adult students bring a level of commitment and maturity to learning transactions often lacking in youthful students (Tice, 1997).

Studies have shown that one of the challenges for returning adult students is a high attrition rate, which may be a result of the lack of successful integration of these students into the collegiate environment. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) explain that educators of adults can assist in integration by understanding the background of returning adult students and developing a curriculum that addresses their particular needs. This, they explained, could be accomplished through: *framing*, *competition*, and *repetition*. Because the assumption is that adult learners are usually more self-directed and task or goal-oriented than traditional students (Knowles, 1980), it's important to *frame* learning strategies in a way that allows adult learners to see the purpose of the exercises; otherwise, adult learners may resist new strategies. Therefore, educators of adults must present new strategies in a way that *competes* with the already ingrained strategy. And in conjunction with this competition approach, the educator of adults will need to

incorporate *repetition*, with variety, so that adult learners test new strategies to test its usefulness. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) stated that adult learners generally have had some level of success in their non-academic lives and they can replicate this success in their academic endeavors if they understand the benefits of new strategies rather than seeing new material as an introductory hoop leading to their true goals (p. 94).

One of the unique aspects that the returning adult student brings to the classroom is life experience. Adults have had more life experiences and in many ways are differently motivated than children (Collins, 2004). According to Graham et al. (2000), these life experiences are influenced by prior experiences such as: previous schooling, home life, or community responsibilities. These experiences influence the returning adult student's perception of how successful they will be in college. Many returning adult students may know more than the instructor on certain topics, and the life experiences they possess can enrich the classroom as a whole. Thus, the classroom dynamics have changed, with the most successful educators tapping into adult students' body of knowledge. Educators of adults should encourage students to enhance basic course content with anecdotes from the working world (Worth & Stephens, 2011).

Lynch and Bishop-Clark's (1998) research suggested that adults students who attended the main campus along with traditional students did not believe faculty were utilizing the life experience that they brought to the classroom. However, it is also important for educators of returning adults to keep in mind that having more life experience can have negative effects because as returning adult students accumulate experience they tend to develop mental habits, biases, and beliefs that tend to cause them to close their minds to new ideas, current perceptions, and alternative ways of thinking (Knowles et al., 2012).

Since adults have had more life experiences, they are in many ways motivated differently than children. Adults are responsive to some external motivators, but the most potent motivators are internal. Their motivation can be blocked by training and education that ignores adult learning principles (Knowles et al., 2012).

Adult education literature states that instructors should recognize that adults have different learning styles and therefore instruction should be tailored to the characteristic ways that adults prefer to learn (Collins, 2004). Parker (1999) conducted a research study which focused specifically on women who are returning adult students. They explained that finding more individualistic ways to identify and respond to the needs of returning women is critical because higher education often treats all students uniformly. And as a result, many women feel that their knowledge, gained over the course of 30, 40, or even 50 years, is insufficiently acknowledged or is disregarded. Because the researchers saw too many such cases where returning women's skills were inadequately challenged in the classroom, they decided to pursue the question of what teaching strategies would work best for returning women. The strategy that Parker discusses is referred to as *mentored learning*.

“Mentoring” and “mentored learning” are not equivalent learning environments. Mentored learning experiences are not teacher-directed learning endeavors as are standard mentoring projects. Instead, mentored learning is a form of pedagogy that moves away from the traditional notion of the mentor/protégé relationship to a learning environment that draws upon the unique strengths of both teacher and student. A mentored learning experience rests on the mutual desire of both its participants to join and decide collaboratively on a topic they would like to learn more about. Neither party is viewed as an expert in a particular field. The topic of the mentored learning project selected is based on the interest of both parties and their desire to learn together and to contribute equally to a project's outcome. The professor and student work as partners, bringing to the mentored learning experience a wide variety of learned and prior knowledge that integrate to produce one final result. (p. 40)

According to Osborn, Daninirsch, and Page (2003), implementing Kolb's four processes of experiential education can address the relevancy needs of adult students. Kolb is considered a leader in the contemporary experiential education movement. He defined experiential learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). His model of experiential learning was based on the works of developmental theorists, one of which was Jean Piaget, whose model of cognitive development was discussed previously in this literature review. Kolb's model is broken up into 4 processes. Process 1: the learning begins with the concrete experience itself. Process 2: the process continues with intentional and guided reflection on or debriefing of that experience. Process 3: abstract conceptualization represents both the integration of learning experiences and the generation of new ideas. Process 4: the final stage is active experimentation where new ideas learned by a member in the previous stage are tested by putting them into practice. Kolb's experiential learning theory involves the learner becoming actively involved in the experience and reflecting on the experience during as well as after.

When listing the six assumptions, Knowles et al. (2012) provided some insight on the need to use certain experiential techniques (i.e. nontraditional teaching methods) when educating adults.

Greater emphasis in adult education is placed on individualization of teaching and learning strategies...the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques— techniques that tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques. Also, greater emphasis is placed on peer-helping activities. (p. 76)

Research in the field of adult education shows that traditional methods are inappropriate for adults and may also be inappropriate for young students (Lawler, 1991). Traditional postsecondary instructional methods tend toward “chalk and talk” lectures and textbooks that assume that students are passive and have little experience to bring to the learning relationship. Traditionally, the teacher defines what, how, and when learning takes place (Kazis et al., 2007). A faculty member using traditional methods would usually have a large class where the instruction would be lecture based. And students would be required to do a great deal of memorization. The amount of involvement from the student would be minimal. And the real-life experiences of the students would not be tapped into. Some believe that true learning can only happen in the aforementioned traditional classroom. Researchers in adult development and adult education have consistently demonstrated that this traditional model alone does not fully serve returning adult students (Tice, 1997).

Traditional teaching methods can not only demean and infantilize returning adults, but they do not acknowledge the real-life experiences and knowledge that the students bring to the classroom. Adult learners benefit from methods that tap their experience base as workers and in other aspects of life (Kazis et al., 2007). Educators might be advised to put aside the PowerPoint slides and instead use the power of project-based learning and various cooperative learning techniques to get the learners actively involved in constructing their own learning (Fenwick, 2003).

In a UK/Belgian study conducted in 2001, lecturers were asked to discuss their teaching methods when returning adult students are among traditional undergraduates. Most reported that they did not modify their teaching style if an adult was in the group.

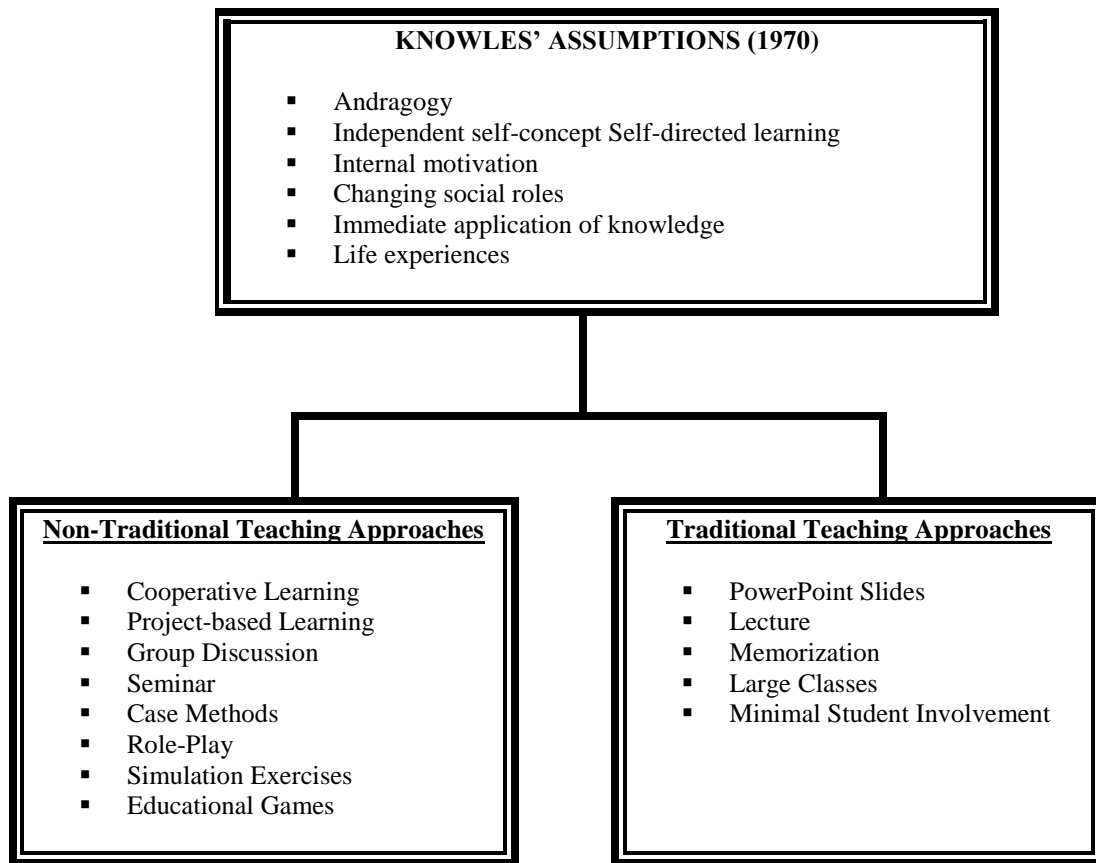
One lecturer stated that he did not know why adult students needed different methods, while another lecturer who did modify his style, noted that he moved more toward group work and seminar discussion teaching (Merrill, 2001). Brinthaupt and Eady (2014) found that although faculty had positive attitudes and perceptions of returning adult students, they still treated their returning adult students similarly to their traditional students. Understanding the principles of adult learning can help educators become better facilitators of learning (Collins, 2004).

There appears to be a wealth of adult education literature pointing to the cons of using traditional methods with returning adult students. And there is a great deal of literature that provides educators of adults with effective alternatives for teaching returning adult students. However, in my thorough search of various databases such as ERIC, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Premier (journal articles, eBooks, textbooks, etc.), there was little to no literature, which explained what is actually taking place in the classroom. This study seeks to shed light on what teaching approaches faculty members are utilizing in their classrooms with returning adults. It's not known if they are sticking with the methods that have commonly been used with traditional students or if they are using methods that are aligned with adult learning principles as adult education literature suggests. With the projection of a continued increase in the number of returning adult students, it is imperative that this problem be addressed and that is what this study seeks to do.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study's literature review examined several different adult learning theories. However, this study will mainly focus on Knowles' (1970) theoretical framework due to his influence on a great deal of adult learning literature (Brookfield, 2013; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Merriam, 2001). That framework will help to form the conceptual framework of this research. From Knowles' framework came various teaching approaches that research has shown to be most effective with adult learners (Figure 1). Those teaching approaches are categorized as non-traditional, whereas the teaching approaches historically used in classrooms with traditional age college students are least effective with adult learners and have been categorized as traditional teaching approaches. This study hopes to shed light on whether educators of returning adult students are drawing from adult learning theory and utilizing non-traditional teaching approaches such as group discussion and role-play or if they are instead using traditional teaching approaches such as lecture with minimal student involvement.





*Figure 1.* Conceptual Framework: Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Teaching Approaches

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this exploratory research was to determine to what extent, if at all, faculty change their teaching approaches when educating returning adult students and how their approaches and experiences align with adult learning principles. This research explored the teaching approaches of 17 behavioral science (psychology, sociology, and anthropology) faculty members from four-year institutions who either previously taught traditional students (students who recently graduated from high school) on a main campus and currently teach returning adult students (adults age 25 and over returning to college or attending for the first time) on a satellite campus (also known as a remote or branch campus) or who are currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus. Behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) faculty were selected because their course content is such that an educator can teach using more nontraditional methods (e.g., group discussion, role play, simulation exercises), whereas faculty who teach subjects such as biology or math may require more traditional methods (e.g., memorization and lecture). It was also helpful to analysis to narrow down the sample down to one discipline being behavioral science. To carry out the purpose of this research, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What differences (if any) do participants perceive between traditional and returning adult students?
2. To what extent do participants change their teaching approaches to meet the needs of the returning adult student?
  - a. How do participants learn to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student?
  - b. What principles (if any) do participants draw on when trying to meet the needs of the returning adult student?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) summary of information needed, (d) overview of research design, (e) methods of data collection, (f) analysis and synthesis of data, (g) ethical considerations, (h) issues of trustworthiness, and (i) limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief closing summary.

### **Rationale for a Modified Exploratory Case Study**

According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006), traditionally, purely qualitative research is often done by persons who hold a framework referred to as interpretive, constructivist, or naturalistic. The authors use the term social constructivism to refer to this approach. Social constructivists challenge the scientific realist assumption that reality can be reduced to its component parts. This philosophical perspective argues that reality is socially constructed by individuals and this social construction leads to multiple meanings. Different persons may bring different conceptual frameworks to a situation based on their experiences, and this will influence what they perceive in a

particular situation. Therefore, the researcher must attempt to understand the complex and often multiple realities from the perspectives of the participants. This approach requires that researchers use data collection methods that bring them closer to the participants using techniques such as in-depth observations, life histories, interviews, videos, and pictures.

Qualitative research aims to give theoretically adequate descriptions of observable everyday practices, descriptions that can thereby be theoretically productive, and generative of new practices. It also aims to study, rather than either naively accepting or overwriting, the ways in which people describe their everyday educational experiences (Freebody, 2006). The qualitative method allowed the participants of this study to provide, through interviews, descriptions of the actual teaching approaches that they utilize with their returning adult students. It is unlikely that purely quantitative methods would have elicited the rich data that was required to provide an elaborate description.

### **Rationale for Interview Methodology**

Qualitative research, also called *interpretive research* or *field research*, uses methodologies that have been borrowed from disciplines like sociology and anthropology and adapted to educational settings (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Within the framework of a qualitative approach, this research study was most suited for an interview study design. Most qualitative research includes interviews (Lodico et al., 2010). Interviews can provide insight into individuals constructed social worlds and into the ways in which they convey those constructions in the particular interactional setting of the interview (Freebody, 2006).

Qualitative researchers focus on the study of social phenomena and on giving voice to the feelings and perceptions of the participants under study (Lodico et al., 2010). The researcher expected these interviews to provide insight into the worlds of the Behavioral science faculty members who teach returning adult students on satellite campuses. There was little to no literature available that explained which teaching approaches are actually being utilized in the classrooms by faculty on satellite campuses and for what purpose and why teachers adapt their teaching to these adult learners' needs and preferences. This data collection method allowed participants to give their perspective of teaching adults on a satellite campus, a perspective that has not been explored much. Therefore, as Lodico et al. (2010) noted, this research study intended to "give voice" to that perspective.

### **The Research Sample**

A judgment sampling (also known as purposive sampling) procedure was used to select this study's sample. Judgment sampling is a method that is often used with interviews. This procedure is selected when specific characteristics of participants are important to the study (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). From here the researcher used a snowball sampling method where subsequent, relevant participants were identified by the initial interviewees. Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit populations not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies (Frost, 2011). The criteria for selection of participants was as follows:

- All participants must be educators of returning adult students who are either pursuing a bachelor's degree in behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or

anthropology) or a behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) minor.

- All participants must identify as behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) faculty members (adjunct or full-time; various ranks).
- All participants must teach on a satellite campus in a traditional classroom setting of a college/university.
- All participants must have met the aforementioned criteria for at least one semester within the past five years.

With criteria as specific as this, the researcher found it challenging to locate individuals who fit the criteria. This is the reason why the previously mentioned sampling procedures were chosen.

Due to the limited number of participants who met the narrow criteria, the study was opened up to include behavioral science faculty members from community colleges as well. The research participants included 17 behavioral science (psychology, sociology, and anthropology) faculty members from various satellite campuses throughout the United States as well as faculty who reported that they taught returning adults students at a community college. Ten faculty members were from the satellite campuses of four-year institutions, while seven taught at a community college. The faculty members were all educators of returning adult students who are either pursuing a bachelor's degree in behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) or an associate degree.

One unique aspect of the sample is that more than half were faculty of color. Nine participants identified as Black/African-American and one identified as Hispanic, while seven identified as White. This was unique in that it does not represent the usual

demographics of a study involving faculty that does not focus on race. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017):

In fall 2015, of the 1.6 million faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, 42 percent were White males, 35 percent were White females, 6 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males, 4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander females, 3 percent each were Black females and Black males, and 2 percent each were Hispanic males and Hispanic females. Among full-time professors, 56 percent were White males, 27 percent were White females, 7 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males, and 2 percent each were Asian/Pacific Islander females, Black males, Hispanic males, and Black females.(p. 2)

Although this sample does not represent the usual demographics of faculty, the diversity proved to be valuable to the study and led to an unexpected finding, which will be discussed in further detail in chapters four and five. Data was collected via qualitative research methods.

### **Information Needed to Conduct the Study**

This research study focused on 17 behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) faculty members from various satellite campuses and community colleges throughout the United States. Two research questions were explored to gather the information needed to understand whether faculty change teaching approaches when making the shift from teaching traditional students to returning adult students, which teaching approaches they utilized, and what guided their thinking. The information needed to answer these research questions were determined by the conceptual framework.

## **Overview of Research Design**

The following list summarizes the steps that were used to carry out this research.

Following this list is a more in-depth discussion of each step.

1. Following the proposal defense, the researcher acquired approval from the IRB to proceed with the research. The IRB approval process involved outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including participants' confidentiality and informed consent.
2. Potential research participants were recruited via two social media sites: LinkedIn and Facebook. A recruitment message was also posted to the TC Message Center. And once institutional approval was granted, some participants were recruited directly from their college/university via email. Those who believed they met the criteria outlined in the recruitment materials agreed to participate and were contacted via email or telephone to schedule an interview.
3. Participants were emailed a consent form, which some chose to sign and return. Since this study was categorized as Exempt by the IRB, participants were also allowed to provide verbal consent the day of the interview as an alternative to signing.
4. The first set of questions on the interview protocol acted as a second level of screening. These background questions allowed the researcher to confirm that the participant met the eligibility criteria. If the criteria were not met then the



participant was notified after the background questions and encouraged to share the researcher's recruitment email with those they felt would be a good fit. Those who were eligible continued with the interview until completion.

5. Through snowball sampling research participants recruited colleagues who they felt would be a good fit for the study.
6. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) faculty members from various satellite campuses (four-year institutions) and community colleges throughout the United States.
7. Using *Dedoose*, interview data responses were analyzed within and between groups of interviewees.

### **Literature Review**

An ongoing and selective review of literature was conducted to inform the study. The following topics of literature were identified: early perspectives of the adult student, adult learning theories (and frameworks), characteristics of the returning adult student, reasons returning adult students return to school, and teaching methods (nontraditional and traditional). This literature assisted the researcher in developing the conceptual framework as well as determine what to include in the interview protocol. The focus of the review was to gain a better overall understanding of the population that the participants teach and the teaching approaches that have been identified to be most effective with that population.

### **Data Collection Method: Interviews**

According to Freebody (2006), interviews are among the most widespread of methods for collecting data in social science. The interview was selected as the method used for data collection in this research. The interview method was felt to be of the most use in the study because it had the potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions. Additionally, it gave the researcher an opportunity to clarify statements and probe for more information.

The specific type of interview, which was utilized in this research study, was a semi-structured interview. This type of interview begins with a predetermined set of questions but allows some latitude in the breadth of relevance. To some extent, what is taken to be relevant to the interviewee is pursued. This means that the interviewer follows particular lines of talk with ad hoc follow-through questions. The talk is typically then tabulated or transcribed in full and the researcher may decide what to analyze in depth, depending on the patterns and themes that emerge. Semi-structured interviews aim to have something of the best of both worlds by establishing a core of issues to be covered, but at the same time leaving the sequence and the relevancies of the interviewee free to vary, around and out from that core (Freebody, 2006).

### **Interview Protocol**

The researcher used the study's two research questions and conceptual framework as the context to develop interview questions. The questions were developed with guidance from the researcher's advisor. Interview questions were tested in a pilot with 2

participants. Following the pilot interviews, the researcher added a question that allowed participants to rate the frequency of their use of various teaching methods with returning adults students. The researcher did not tell participants which methods were considered traditional vs. nontraditional. Since the researcher was unable to observe faculty in their classrooms, a question was added to provide information about the physical set-up of the classroom (Appendix E).

### **Interview Process**

The researcher posted recruitment letters on two social media sites: LinkedIn and Facebook. The recruitment letter was also posted to the Teachers College (TC) Message Center. In addition, the researcher contacted the IRB of various four-year institutions with satellite campuses and requested approval to recruit their faculty. Once institutional approval was received, the researcher sent the IRB approved recruitment letter via email to the Behavioral Science faculty at the institutions. The recruitment letter described the purpose of the study, provided eligibility criteria, invited members to participate, and requested a convenient date and time for an interview. Before each interview, respondents were emailed a university consent form. The consent form was signed and returned before the interview took place. Since this study was categorized as Exempt by the IRB, participants were also allowed to provide verbal consent. Interviews were conducted either via telephone, Skype, or Zoom and with permission each interview was digitally recorded. Upon completion of the interview, the digital recordings were transcribed, and then deleted in order to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 2

*Interview and Research Questions*

Interview Questions	Research Questions			
	What challenges (if any) do participants perceive in teaching returning adult students?	How (if at all) do participants try to address these challenges?	What principles (if any) do participants draw on when trying to meet these challenges?	How do participants evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching approaches they use with returning adult students?
How would you describe your experience teaching returning adult students on a satellite campus?	X			
Do you believe that returning adult students should be taught in the same manner that faculty would teach a traditional student? Explain.	X	X	X	X
When you have taught returning adult students on a satellite campus, what challenges (if any) did you perceive?	X			
How (if at all) did you try to address these challenges?	X	X	X	
What principles (if any) do you draw on when trying to meet these challenges?		X	X	
What teaching approaches do you use when educating returning adult students?			X	X
How do you decide on which teaching approaches to utilize?		X	X	
How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching approaches that you use with returning adult students?			X	X

### **Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis**

Stake (2010) encourages researchers to start a plan for interpretation of data in the early stages of the study, not too long after obtaining institutional review board approval. The researcher created a list of codes based on the research questions, conceptual framework, and research questions. According to Stake, coding is a common feature of qualitative analysis and synthesis. Coding is sorting all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study. It can be structured by the research question or by a concept map. It can start early or be held back until most of the data are collected. The code categories are gradually focused, changing as the research question takes on new meanings and as the fieldwork turns up new stories and relationships. But that means, however, that data already coded may have to be recoded.

The researcher chose to complete the analysis process using electronic coding software. Gillham (2005) states that for most lone researchers working on small to medium-scale projects electronic coding is not really necessary. However, this researcher was most familiar with electronic coding and found that this method was best due to the time sensitive nature of dissertation completion.

Using *Dedoose*, a cross platform app for analyzing qualitative data, the researcher coded two interviews. Along with a list of codes, the two interviews were sent to a doctoral student who was experienced in coding qualitative data. The student coded the two interviews and returned them to the researcher. Following the completion of coding, the researcher a doctoral student discussed how interviews were coded. The comparison

of coded interviews showed 90% agreement. Any differences were discussed and clarified. After inter-coder reliability was determined, the researcher confirmed the designations with her research advisor. Then the coding of interview continued until completion.

The coding process fragments the interview into separate categories, forcing one to look at each detail, whereas synthesis involves piecing these fragments together to reconstruct a holistic and integrated explanation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Overall, the researcher's approach was to come up with a number of clusters, patterns, or themes that were linked together, either similarly or divergently, and that collectively described or analyzed the research arena. Toward this end, the researcher essentially followed a three-layered process in thinking about the data. First, she examined and compared threads and patterns within categories. Second, she compared connecting threads and patterns across categories. Third, the proposed work was situated with respect to prior research and was compared and contrasted with issues that have been raised by the broader literature. These three layers were separate but were interlocked and iterative throughout the synthesizing process.

### **Methods for Assuring Protection of Human Subjects**

As a former Institutional Review Board Coordinator, this researcher understood the importance of assuring the protection of all participants. The Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services [HHS], 1979 ) is generally the basis for review of research proposals. The Belmont Report outlines the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research. It was developed by the National

Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research in 1979. Along with other important information, it provides researchers with the 3 basic ethical principles, which must be adhered to when conducting research with human subjects. This research study followed these 3 principles throughout the course of the study. The 3 principles were: (1) Respect for persons, (2) Beneficence, and (3) Justice. The following principles are explained below as they related to this research study.

*Respect for persons* involves treating individuals as autonomous agents (HHS, 1979). Participants were treated as autonomous agents. Autonomous agents are people who can make an informed decision about their personal goals and well-being. This principle also includes the requirement of informed consent. Subjects, to the degree that they are capable, must be given the opportunity to choose what shall or shall not happen to them. Each participant was provided with a detailed consent form for them to review and sign prior to being interviewed. Contact information was provided on each consent form in order to allow the potential participants to ask any questions they may have had about the study prior to deciding whether or not to participate.

*Beneficence* involves minimizing harm to subjects and maximizing benefits (HHS, 1979). This research study only involved participants answering a series of interview questions. Questions were noninvasive and the researcher did not foresee anyone becoming uncomfortable as a result. However, since the questions were related to what faculty members do in their workplace, some participants did not want their identity revealed. Therefore, the researcher kept all signed consent forms in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher had access to. Each interview was digitally recorded then

transcribed immediately following the interview. All identifiers (e.g., participant's name and name of college/university where they are/were employed) were removed during transcription. Digital recordings of the interviews were deleted once transcribed. Even though these safeguards were in place, participants were given the opportunity to stop at any time. Participants who are interested can receive the research findings. This may benefit them in their career as a faculty member by providing them with information on what other educators of returning adults are doing in their classrooms.

*Justice* involves ensuring that the all participants are treated equally and fairly (HHS, 1979). All participants have the opportunity to request a copy of the research findings. Therefore, they all received the same benefit and as stated previously, the researcher did not foresee risks for any participants.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

According to Phillips and Carr (2009), trustworthiness includes: transparency of process; data gathered with and for a purpose; a deliberate stance of seeking multiple perspectives, including those found in the literature; *praxis* and change in the researcher and in practice; and thus, results that matter. In studies that take a quantitative approach, the terms reliability and validity are routinely used to address the trustworthiness of the research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of qualitative research should be assessed differently. Therefore, instead of reliability and validity, this qualitative study used the terms: *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability*. In order to achieve these, the researcher used strategies suggested by



Lincoln and Guba such as: external audit, reflexive journal, and thick description. These strategies were chosen because they were the most applicable based on research design.

**Credibility.** Credibility is known in quantitative research as validity. It refers to the confidence in the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers can use strong designs to strengthen the credibility of their studies and to ensure that the collected data will properly address the research topic being studied (Yin, 2015).

**Dependability.** Dependability is known in quantitative research as reliability. It refers to the consistency of the study's findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). And it answers the question of whether or not the findings could be repeated. In order to ensure dependability, the researcher will use *external audits*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), *external audits* involve having a researcher not involved in the research process examine both the process and product of the research study. The purpose is to evaluate the accuracy and evaluate whether or not the findings, interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data. Since this research study was conducted as a requirement for completion of a doctoral degree, the researcher's dissertation advisor acted as an external auditor.

**Confirmability.** According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. In order to ensure confirmability, the researcher will use the reflexivity strategy. Positional reflexivity refers to the self-examination of the researcher's own positioning within the context of the research; particular emphasis is placed on accounting for those more hidden aspects (i.e., power, privilege, exploitation) of the research which may result from the researcher's particular involvement, including

his/her relationship to subjects in a given study (Midgley, Davies, Oliver, & Danaher, 2014). The degree of researcher's personal familiarity with the experience of participants potentially impacts all phases of the research process, including recruitment of participants, collecting data via interviews and/or observations, analyzing and making meaning of the data, and drawing conclusions (Berger, 2015).

The researcher developed a *reflexive journal*. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that developing a *reflexive journal* is one way to foster reflexivity. A *reflexive journal* is a type of diary where a researcher makes regular entries during the research process. In these entries, the researcher recorded: methodological decisions and the reasons for them; the logistics of the study; and reflections upon what was happening in terms of one's own values and interests.

**Transferability.** Transferability refers to the applicability of one set of findings to another setting (Sikolia, Biros, Mason, & Weiser, 2013). According to Yin (2015) transferability involves posing a study's implications (its working hypotheses and related propositions) at a conceptual level higher than that of the specific findings or of the specific conditions in the initial study. Preferably, the higher conceptual level embraces ideas or concepts that align with the prevailing research literature, in part to determine the nature of any congruence between the study findings and the literature. In order to ensure transferability, the researcher used *thick description*. *Thick description* is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving a type of external validity. By describing a situation in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Thick descriptions necessitate that researchers conducting case studies use interview,

observation, documents, and artifacts as their primary tools (Lodico et al., 2010). The primary tool for data collection in this research study was interviews. Redacted syllabi were also collected from participants who were willing to provide one and still had one in their possession.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study contained certain limiting conditions, some of which was related to the common critiques of qualitative research methodology in general and some of which are inherent in this study's research design. Careful thought has been given to ways of accounting for these limitations and to ways of minimizing their impact. Unique features of qualitative research methodology present potential limitations in its usage (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Because analysis ultimately rests with the thinking and choices of the researcher, qualitative studies in general are limited by researcher subjectivity. Therefore, an overriding concern is that of researcher bias, framing as it does assumptions, interests, perceptions, and needs. One of the key limitations of this study was the issue of subjectivity and potential bias regarding the researchers' own experience as a psychology faculty member who taught returning adults on satellite campuses.

A related limitation was that interviewees may have had difficulty adjusting to the researcher taking on the role of interviewer, a phenomenon referred to as *participant reactivity*. Because a few of the participants knew the researcher, their responses may have been influenced or effected. They may have tried overly hard to cooperate with the researcher by offering responses they perceived the researcher sought. Alternatively,

because of familiarity with the researchers, these few participants may have been guarded and therefore less candid in their responses. In this study, all participants appeared to answer questions openly and honestly with as much detail as possible regardless of whether they were familiar with the researcher or not.

The researcher looked for interview responses that were aligned with the assumptions noted in Chapter 1. One assumption was that educators of returning adult students did not draw on adult learning principles because having a background in adult learning is usually not listed as a requirement in the faculty job description. The researcher was surprised to find that some faculty were actually familiar with adult learning principles and drew upon them in their teaching practice. This is discussed in further detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Recognizing these limitations, the researcher took the following measures. She acknowledged her research agenda and stated assumptions upfront. Coding schemes and coded transcripts were examined by advisors and intercoder reliability was determined. To reduce the limitation of potential bias, transcribed interviews were stripped of all identifiers, so as not to associate any material or data with any particular participant. To address the problem of participant reactivity, the researcher continued to reflect on how and in what ways she might have been influencing participants. Furthermore, the researcher made a conscious attempt to create an environment that was conducive to honest and open dialogue. The researcher's experience as an interviewer, as well as prior research experience, were helpful in this regard.

## **Chapter Summary**

This researcher studied the teaching approaches of 17 behavioral science (psychology, sociology, or anthropology) faculty members from various satellite campuses (four-year institutions) and faculty from community colleges throughout the United States. The faculty members were all educators of returning adult students. Data was collected via qualitative research methods.

Semi-structured interviews were the research method utilized. The information that was obtained from the 17 in-depth individual interviews subsequently formed the basis for the overall findings of this study. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed, all digital recordings were deleted, and all identifiable information was removed. As a result, all interview transcripts were anonymous.

The analysis of data was guided by the study's research questions, conceptual framework, and literature review. The coding categories were created and refined on an ongoing basis throughout the course of the study and intercoder reliability was determined.

## Chapter IV

### PRESENTING FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this modified exploratory case study was to explore the teaching approaches of behavioral science faculty members from four-year institutions who either previously taught traditional students and currently teach returning adult students or who are currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus. Due to the limited number of participants who met the narrow criteria, the study was opened up to include behavioral science faculty members from community colleges as well.

The extent to which participants change their teaching approaches to meet the needs of the returning adult student and if the changes they make reflect Knowles' list of assumptions (a theoretical framework for effectively educating adults) was examined. The researcher believed that this study would not only add to adult education literature, but also provide a window into the world of teaching on a satellite campus and suggest a range of possible teaching approaches for faculty members who educate returning adult students. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the 17 in-depth interviews.

Table 3

*Demographics*

<b>4-Year Institution-Satellite Campus Participants</b>						
	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Years Teaching Adults</b>	<b>Years Teaching Undergraduates</b>
1)	Mark	B	M	SE	1	8
2)	Gill	B	M	SW	5	5
3)	Jordan	B	M	MW	5	5
4)	James	B	M	MW	20	20
5)	Mary	B	F	MW	6	6
6)	Angie	B	F	NE	1	5
7)	Porsha	W	F	MW	18	22
8)	Nell	W	F	MW	3	3
9)	Sarah	W	F	MW	8	12
10)	Rob	W	M	MW	3	4
<b>Community College Participants</b>						
11)	Lisa	B	F	NE	9	15
12)	Sandra	B	F	MW	10	10
13)	Dawn	B	F	NE	8	12
14)	Sally	W	F	SE	8	8
15)	Annie	W	F	NE	25	30
16)	John	W	M	NW	5	5
17)	Don	H	M	NE	1	1

*Note:* **Legend:** B=Black, W=White; F=Female, M=Male; MW=Midwest, NE=Northeast, NW=Northwest, SE=Southeast, SW=Southwest

**Sample**

The sample was made up of Behavioral Science faculty members from four-year institutions who either previously taught traditional students and currently teach returning adult students or who are currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus. It was ideal to utilize those who teach on

satellite campuses because the student body on these campuses is if not completely, almost entirely is made up of returning adult students. Satellite campuses are affiliated with, but not physically connected to the main campus of a college/university. Satellite campuses are commonly geared towards nontraditional students, have fewer resources, house fewer faculty members, and are located in office buildings. They are also referred to as a branch or remote campuses.

Due to the limited number of participants who met the narrow criteria of having taught at a satellite campus, the study was opened up to include Behavioral Science faculty members from community colleges as well. Ten participants were from four-year institutions while seven were from community colleges. Most of the participants based their interviews from experience as full-time faculty (14) while a few (3) spoke from their experience as adjuncts. Table 1 presents more details on the participant demographics.

These two groups could have been perceived as quite different. However, the responses provided to interview questions overall were so similar across the two groups that even the researcher found it difficult at times to remember who was from which group. In chapter five this researcher discusses the similarities and possible explanations for the lack of differences in more detail.

One unique aspect of the sample is that more than half were faculty of color. Nine participants identified as Black/African-American and one identified as Hispanic, while seven identified as White. This was unique in that it does not represent the usual demographics of a study involving faculty that does not focus on race. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017):



in fall 2015, of the 1.6 million faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, 42 percent were White males, 35 percent were White females, 6 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males, 4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander females, 3 percent each were Black females and Black males, and 2 percent each were Hispanic males and Hispanic females. Among full-time professors, 56 percent were White males, 27 percent were White females, 7 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander males, and 2 percent each were Asian/Pacific Islander females, Black males, Hispanic males, and Black females.

Although this sample does not represent the usual demographics of faculty, the

diversity proved to be valuable to the study and led to an unexpected finding, which will be discussed in further detail in this chapter and Chapter 5.

### **Findings**

Five major findings emerged from this study:

1. All ten participants from four-year institutions expressed that the satellite campus environment posed challenges. These challenges included: adult students with demanding outside responsibilities, lower education level than students on main campus, all students are commuters, insufficient on-campus services, and unequal treatment of faculty.
2. The majority of the participants stated that returning adult students should not be taught in the same manner as traditional students.
3. When discussing the challenges of the returning adult student, all participants expressed that both social role conflict and time management were overlapping issues. Faculty also expressed personal challenges with life experience, age, and culture when educating returning adults.
4. Some participants had formal education/training in adult learning theory, but the vast majority stated that more informal means (professional experience,

personal experience as an adult learner, race, gender, upbringing, and speaking to adult students) guided their teaching approaches and how they adapted to the challenges of returning adult students.

5. The majority of participants were able to review their formal course evaluations and found the responses to open-ended questions most helpful. However, in comparison, several participants found that informal methods of evaluations were much more valuable and had a bigger influence on whether they modified their teaching approaches.

### **Finding #1**

*All ten participants from the four-year institutions (10 of 10 <100%>) expressed that the satellite campus environment posed challenges. These challenges included: adult students with demanding outside responsibilities, lower education level than students on main campus, all students are commuters, insufficient on-campus services, and unequal treatment of faculty.*

Although this was not 100% of the participants, this does account for 100% of those with satellite campus experience making this an important finding. Even though participants came from various institutions across the U.S., there are still similarities between responses. Based on the descriptions provided there appeared to be a clear difference between the satellite and main campus. Participants expressed the difference in student population and the challenges associated with this unique population, which caused them to modify their teaching approaches.

Each participant came from a different satellite campus. Therefore, when asked about challenges (if any) of teaching on a satellite campus, the responses varied. The quotes below show what each participant expressed as a unique challenge on their campus.

One participant explained how the returning adult students on the satellite campus were not on the same educational level as the traditional students on the main campus and were more likely to be learning disabled. She discussed how as a result, her and her colleagues modified assignments to meet the needs of this population:

**Education level.** I think with a satellite campus we attracted on average, a different type of student than what we typically see on the main campus, students who were returning adult students who maybe were more likely to have a learning disability. Maybe they weren't like the A+ student all through high school, maybe they had some more challenges. Something that I and my colleagues found ourselves doing is making sure that we're meeting the students where they were at the time. Essentially the education level that they were coming in with on average tended to be a little bit lower than those that we would see on the main campus. (Sarah, W, F)

Another participant explained how the returning adult students on the satellite campus had outside responsibilities tied to their multiple social roles. When developing assignments for the course, she explains that she is mindful of the demands of these roles. Therefore, similar to Sarah, she modified assignments to better fit the population:

**Outside responsibilities.** I definitely design my assignments, and think about teaching, with the satellite campus in mind. One of the major ways that I do that, is that I realize that students are extremely busy outside of class, and often are coming straight from work, going straight back to pick up kids, and so on. For that reason, I only assign group work if I can create space in the classroom, for students to work together. I know some professors like to give extra credit for going to events. I think it would be unfair to students who just don't have that option. (Nell, W, F)

Similar to Nell, another participant referenced the returning adult students' outside responsibilities. He pointed out that the students on satellite campuses (like community colleges) are all commuter students. Unlike traditional students on the main campus, they don't stay on campus after classes; they leave to take care of their responsibilities. And also similar to Nell, this is something that he kept in mind when designing his assignments except he mentions that he incorporates things they can do while on campus to provide them with a better sense of the college community:

**Commuter students.** The thing about having a satellite campus is that students are transient, meaning they don't stay in the dorms. So, they don't really get a sense of the college community, and the culture. So, that student engagement piece, we have to find another way to connect the students to the institution. I find myself intentionally having them do assignments on campus. Like, I would have them do a scavenger hunt, to try to find all of the resources. Or do something like, where I might have class – we won't have face-to-face, but I would say, "I need you guys to work on this assignment in the lobby," or "in the student center," to try to give them a sense of community, because for most students, it's just come in the class, and go. (Gill, B, M)

The challenges on the satellite campus noted by participants tended to be student based, but one participant explained issues with the services on the campus. She explains that for the most part they did have the same services (career services, financial aid, business office, etc.) as the main campus, but they didn't have as much staff to serve the students on the campus. She also noted a lack of diversity of staff to serve the diverse student population. As previously mentioned, she found herself making changes to accommodate this population. However, instead of teaching approaches, she found the importance in communicating more with her colleagues on the satellite campus in order to determine what would be the best course of action to assist their population. She notes that in many cases students were referred to the main campus for services:

**Insufficient services.** We had a lot of support on the satellite campus, but we didn't have as many bodies doing the support. Sometimes we would just refer students to main campus. An example of that would be career services. It was really ran by two people, and so, when you're dealing with a diverse population of students, and you're dealing with two older, White women, and that's the only diversity you have, that's a challenge, because we've got international students, students who spoke other languages, we had students who were veterans, students who were previously incarcerated, we had high school students taking college classes, and so the spread was large. We just had to figure out very creative ways to make sure that students were connected to relevant people. (Mary, B, F)

Also, in line with Mary's comment, another participant also expressed challenges that were not student based. She brought attention to the unequal treatment of faculty on the satellite campus vs the main campus. She explained how the faculty on the satellite campus did not receive as much respect from administration. Another issue she pointed out was her lack of necessary space on the satellite campus:

**Unequal treatment of faculty.** They were treated like the stepchild in the negative sense, not the same as faculty on the main campus, not as much respect. I did not have a personal space for myself, whatever I was bringing I had to keep with me. I didn't have an office. They did allow me to use the copy machine and things like that so it wasn't an issue of not being able to get materials. It was definitely an issue of not being able to store materials. (Angie, B, F)

## **Finding #2**

*The majority of the participants (13 of 17 <76%>) stated that returning adult students should not be taught in the same manner as traditional students.*

**Change in teaching approaches.** A major finding in this study is that participants believe returning adult students have unique needs and should not be taught in the same manner as traditional students. Development, life experience, multiple social roles, and motivation were the most frequently mentioned differences.

Development was one reason provided for changing teaching approaches when making the shift from teaching traditional students to teaching returning adult students. John discusses how returning adult students are at a different stage of development both cognitively and socially. Therefore, he believes they have a different frame of reference. As a result, he modifies his teaching approaches:

***Development.*** I do think there is a little bit of a difference when you're looking at students who are under 24 and over 24 in some cases just based on their cognitive capacities. 24 is when you actually will have the maximum brain power your brain will have developmentally, and when you have students who are under 24 I think you have to have a little bit of a different approach in terms of how you discuss concepts and also the frame of reference is different. A lot of the students I have taught who were adults they are working; they have had careers, multiple careers or they may be going through life changes that probably the traditional-aged student coming out of high school does not have that context. So, when I'm teaching and give examples or activities, I make sure that it's a little different than I would do if I were teaching students who are traditional aged. (John, W, M, CC)

Life experience was another reason provided for changing teaching approaches when making the shift from teaching traditional students to teaching returning adult students. Like John, Mark also believes that returning adult students and traditional students have different frames of reference. However, he focuses more on what students have experienced socially in their lives and how as a result, it's easier for him to explain certain concepts such as gentrification to returning adult students who have lived to see the evolution of certain neighborhoods:

***Life experience.*** I found it difficult to teach in the same manner. Theory the same, but with exercises that call for experience it can be done more so with adult students. The traditional students don't remember telephones (landlines), but adults remember 8 tracks and when the TV had 3 channels and only black & white. With adults I can change things around so I can use my own experience as well as theirs. When I teach race and ethnicity or social stratification the older students can identify with gentrification, they can relate, but younger students haven't heard of it before. The adults have more life, training, and experience than traditional students. (Mark, B, M, 4S)

Similar to Mark and John, Rob quickly noticed that when he made the shift to teaching returning adult students he could not utilize the same teaching approaches he was accustomed to utilizing with traditional students. He realized that returning adult students had multiple social roles that could be in conflict with education. Therefore, their workload had to be manageable whereas, traditional students in his opinion only had one major responsibility, which was school:

***Multiple social roles.*** Your traditional students, for the most part, some might have some jobs, but their whole job is school, right? Their job is to go back to their dorm or wherever and do their work. On this campus, I came in with sort of the traditional student body expectations and requirements, so a much heavier reading load. And it was definitely a shock for students and a shock for me to learn that that was a big challenge for them because lots of them were balancing family. They might be looking after their parents, if their parents are older. They work, and they're trying to go to college and changes in, perhaps, their career path. So, to place the same level of expectations on them as a student who is basically just studying, I quickly realized I couldn't do that, I had to change the way I was approaching teaching. I didn't want to dumb it down, essentially, but I wanted to find a way to give them a good education, challenge them, while respecting the reality of their life, and trying to find that balance. (Rob, W, M, 4S)

**No change in teaching approaches.** Some participants (4 of 17 <23%>) admitted that they did not change their teaching approaches when making the shift from teaching traditional to returning adult students. Their reasons for not making modifications included their belief they used universally effective teaching approaches and focused on learning style instead of age. Dawn (B, F, CC) explained the idea of learning style taking precedence over age.

The traditional student does not look the same as it had in the 90s or even early 2000s. Therefore, adult students older than 18-25 should be taught just the same with the exception of everyone having their own learning style. I do not change my teaching approaches based on the traditional or returning adult. My teaching style is based on the learner's needs and how they absorb information.

Table 4

*Challenges*

<b>4-Year Institution-Satellite Campus Participants</b>					
<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Social Role Conflict</b>	<b>Confidence</b>	<b>Academic</b>	<b>Health</b>
1) Mark	X	X		X	
2) Gill	X	X		X	
3) Jordan	X	X		X	
4) James	X	X			
5) Mary	X	X	X		
6) Angie	X	X		X	
7) Porsha	X	X			
8) Nell	X	X	X		
9) Sarah	X	X	X	X	
10) Rob	X	X			
TOTAL	10	10	3	5	0
	(100%)	(100%)	(30%)	(50%)	(0%)
<b>Community College Participants</b>					
11) Lisa	X	X		X	X
12) Sandra	X	X			
13) Dawn	X	X			
14) Sally	X	X			
15) Annie	X	X		X	
16) John	X	X			
17) Don	X	X		X	X
TOTAL	7	7	0	3	2
	(100%)	(100%)	(0%)	(43%)	(29%)

Similar to Dawn, Mary also disagreed with the idea of teaching a student a certain way because of their age. When making the shift to teaching returning adult students, she recognized their differences, but believed the approach to teaching should vary based on the individual student and her/his needs. Instead of assuming where the student is based on being traditional or returning adult, Mary believed that faculty should get to know the students in their class then modify based on that. This could mean making changes to teaching approaches each semester to tailor to the needs of the class (not specifically the needs of the returning adult student).



When I think of teaching traditional college students versus non-traditional college students, I go to this, like, problematic space, because I feel like there's just a big issue in education, period, and treating students as if we're running an assembly line...and I think that regardless of who you teach, you have to, one, understand the class culture that you're dealing with, and that's going to require taking time to build rapport. The other thing is being clear about what it is that needs to be taught. And so, as you quickly develop a relationship with your students, then you modify what needs to be taught based on what you're seeing, and so that might mean that this group does better with some online follow-up work, and group accountability work, or this group does better with lecture. (Mary, B, F, 4S)

### **Finding #3**

*When discussing the challenges of the returning adult student, all participants (17 of 17 <100%>) expressed that both social role conflict and time management were overlapping issues. Faculty also expressed personal challenges with life experience, age, and culture when educating returning adults.*

It was not surprising to find that all participants perceived social role conflict and time management as overlapping issues with returning adult students (See Table 2). Part of what participants felt was unique about this population of students was the fact that they have “lived life” as Sally noted. And that includes having had careers or currently working in addition to going to school and many times also being a parent. These social roles are all demanding on the student's time and participants have had to address these and other challenges (lack of confidence and health issues) in order to help their returning adult students succeed.

One participant, Lisa, lists several social roles that returning adults have. And she explains how these roles can conflict with their ability to be good students. Therefore, she

notes that she talks to her returning adult students about ways they can manage their time effectively.

The biggest challenges are the outside factors-mitigating factors: babysitters, job complications, job scheduling, health issues (including mental health). We talk about preparation, time management; trying to restructure their lives from parent, employee, significant other (wife/husband) to incorporating student as a primary factor. Making a transition or being able to balance all other roles in their life. All those things that traditional students don't have to worry about. They have to stabilize their home environment to be a good student. (Lisa, B, F, CC)

**Maintaining rigor.** It has been noted numerous times in previous sections, that participants believed returning adult students have outside responsibilities as a result of their multiple roles. These responsibilities can be quite time consuming. Therefore, faculty like Porsha are aware that these students may have issues with time management. She expresses her concern with trying to maintain rigor, while also attempting to be lenient in some ways with returning adult students.

The whole time management piece. Knowing that these adult learners are full-time employees; work and kids and family. I know that's been some concern. I mean, I'm a stickler on rigor, so I want to keep the rigor, but I have noticed that I've been more lenient on timelines. So, for me, it's been, with my adult learners in some cases, it's been timeline type of things. You know, getting assignments in on certain time, due to all of their responsibilities. (Porsha, W, F, 4S)

Nell also struggled with trying to be flexible with returning adult students because of their multiple roles while still maintaining rigor. Similar to Porsha, she notes that time is the main challenge she sees with her returning adult students. Unlike Porsha however, she mentioned another challenge. She noticed that her older female students in their 50s or 60s tend to lack confidence in their academic abilities. These are challenges that Nell addresses.

I would say time is the main challenge and figuring out how to give students the rigor that they deserve, the depth of education that they deserve, in an amount that they can fit into their life, so that they don't get overwhelmed, and just give up.

For my oldest returning adult students, in their 50s and 60s, confidence. Because I have noticed this phenomenon, particularly among women. I have quite a few women who either worked, or they took care of their families, and now their children are grown up, and they're coming back, to finish their degree. I have noticed that they think that the quality of their work is lower than that of other students, and that is totally false. Their papers are great, and their contributions in class are terrific. I just try to assure them that "No, your work is great. I really value what you bring to this classroom. The other students are lucky that you're here." (Nell, W, F, 4S)

**Life experience as a barrier to learning.** Although the social roles of returning adult students are demanding and can pose a challenge to their educational success, social roles also provide them with a wealth of life experiences. Those life experiences can be an asset in the classroom or they can be yet another barrier to learning. Two participants (2 of 17 <11%>) noted that this has been the case.

Don explains that he has found when educating returning adult students, they had trouble with thinking critically. He states that their life experience causes them to be over confident. He sees this as both an asset and a barrier to their learning.

Sometimes nontraditional students are less likely to be critical about their own thinking. They have larger experience and that tends them to be more extra confident of their thinking so they feel entitled to share their experience and to be an extra asset to the class. In several occasions they are, but in several occasions their experience makes them more arrogant, less to question and criticize some of their own thinking. So, they feel that they have been traveling these ways for a longer period so they feel entitled to teach their experience to younger students which means in several occasions is an asset but in several occasions that blocks them from the possibility to be more critical about their own mental processes and in general of what critical thinking might be. (Don, H, M, CC)

Jordan also explains how life experience can be both an asset and a barrier to the learning of returning adult students. He provides an example from his experience teaching an Introduction to Family course and discusses how some returning adult students have generalized views of families based on their own experiences. Jordan states

that the difficulty occurs when students are faced with theories that are in opposition to their experiences.

I draw on the students experiences to help them understand concepts...getting students to separate their personal anecdotal experiences versus what happens in most families or even most families within the subgroup that I identify with is a challenge. Just because your family views a family as it's the greatest thing in the world that doesn't mean it's the case in other families. Some are constantly abusing people in their families. So, that's not a safe haven. Some have overgeneralized views about family as a safe haven. It's not for everybody. Sometimes that's the most painful part of people's lives. Getting some older students to step away from those beliefs was difficult. So, getting them to see their own personal experience may or may not match up with what most people experiencing similar things experience. (Jordan, B, M, 4S)

**Challenges faced by faculty.** When thinking of challenges when educating returning adults, the immediate thought leads us to list obstacles that the student has. However, some participants discussed personal challenges due to their age, culture, or life experience that they as educators struggled with when educating returning adult students. Although, only a few (*4 of 17 <23%>*) expressed personal challenges, their thoughts seemed vital to understanding their approach to educating returning adult students.

James expressed the personal concerns he had when he began teaching a parenting course to returning adult students. He revealed that he was not married and didn't have children yet he was teaching students who were married with children. He felt that their life experience may have made them more knowledgeable about the topic than him.

Well, this is just unique to me. I'm not married and I don't have any kids of my own so when I've been teaching courses on parenting for the first couple times I would teach those courses I felt a little bit like, if that's going to put me at a disadvantage or are people going to think I don't have that much credibility, and my professors and all my mentors said, that's not a problem. You do know some things and knowledge and experience are not the same thing. And you know as

you work with people you will gain more and more experience through what their experiences were. So, that was one challenge when I first started because of some of the folks that I was teaching they had kids and sometimes grandkids and so I would be talking about things that I knew about academically in a scholarly way, but I didn't know it necessarily experientially. (James, B, M, 4S)

Like James, Nell also expressed a personal challenge she faced when educating returning adults. Nell found it difficult to navigate the challenge of being younger than some of her returning adult students. Based on her upbringing, she believed that her elders should never be addressed by their first name. However, when in a classroom setting, usually the professor is referred to as Mr./Mrs./Dr. while students are called by their first name. This was a challenge for Nell.

I am 34, and I have students who are very obviously and visibly older than me. I grew up in China, and I did my dissertation field work in Taiwan. I'm American by citizenship. I'm a White American, but I have this sort of mixed cultural bag, because of my upbringing. And this idea about being respectful to elders is really important to me, and it is a little weird to me to be speaking to someone who is 50 years old, who is calling me Dr. Carter, and I'm calling them by their first name. That feels rude! But I don't really know how to navigate that. I want students to call me Dr. Carter, especially being a young female professor. I don't feel like I can take that boundary away. I think it's important for us to establish that with them. (Nell, W, F, 4S)

#### **Finding #4**

*Some participants (3 of 17 < 17%>) had formal training/education in adult learning theory, but the vast majority (14 of 17< 82%>) stated that more informal means (professional experience, personal experience as an adult learner, race, gender, upbringing, and speaking to adult students) guided their teaching approaches and how they adapted to the challenges of returning adult students.*

**Formal education/training in adult learning theory.** Two participants held graduate degrees in adult education and one participant took courses in adult learning

theory as part of a doctoral program. Sally commented on her formal education in adult learning, “That’s what my Master’s was in and I didn’t actually intend to go into adult education I kind of fell into it and so through that program I learned you know that adult student learning is very different and the types of learning, the types of projects they do is very different than the traditional-aged student. When I was in graduate school we replicated a study about self-directed learning, and that’s where I really realized that adult students are dramatically more self-directed than traditional-aged students.”

**Professional experience.** Most participants either learned how to adapt to the challenges of returning adults students either by way of professional development, life experience, intuition, or professional experience. Porsha explained how her professional experience educating students from various age groups and backgrounds lead her to be a more flexible and adaptable educator.

My focus is teaching my students where they are not where I think they ought to be or teaching them the way I would prefer to teach. I am adaptable and flexible based on who is sitting in front of me— I’m a community-based sex educator. So, this college stuff was my part-time gig. I had to learn to roll from 4th grade to 12th grade to doing professional trainings for teachers or hanging out in a jail working with you know grown-men who ran a stop sign cause they were drunk. I’ve taught so many different populations and in one week. This adaptability is kind of what I know how to do. I don’t have a teaching license. I don’t have a degree in teaching. I did you know obviously a lot of workshops and a lot of training on how to. I’m sure I’ve had some formal awareness around adult learners. I mean I’ve been doing it 25 years. (Porsha, W, F, 4S)

Like Porsha, Gill believes his background taught him how to adapt to the needs of his returning adult students. Unlike Porsha however, he stated that he has a background in education (not adult learning), stays current on adult learning literature, and has professional experience specifically in special education and disability services.

I would say I've been fortunate to really be abreast of the literature. And I have a background in special education and learning theory. So, I guess that exposure to diverse learners, quality matters, those type. And then being a coordinator of disability in higher education, you understand people need accommodations. And then, you get an opportunity to really see the disabilities, and being able to tie them to a cognitive level. So, my experience with understanding cognitive levels and appropriate materials, and what people are able to do, and how to present some content, I think it's just that background that allows me to be flexible. (Gill, B, M, 4S)

**Personal experience.** Some (3 of 17 <17%>) participants admitted that they pulled from their personal experience as adult students. This caused them to empathize with their students because they could relate to a certain extent with their returning adult students. Lisa (B, F, CC) commented, "I would say probably using my own experience because I was a traditional student undergraduate but, of course, when I got my Master's and then Doctorate degree I was more mature, had kids, was married you know was a whole lot of other different factors. But really a lot of it was just taking into account my own life experiences."

**Speaking to students.** One participant stated that he remained current on adult learning theory by way of journal articles and professional development on teaching adult learner. But he found that the best way to learn how to adapt to the needs of returning adult students was by speaking to his students. He gathered background information from them in order to learn more about them and modify his teaching as a result.

I think it's important to ask them. The first thing I do in each class is I ask. I find out a little bit of background. Is it their first class? Are they near the end? Where are they at? What specifically do they have in terms of anxiety more or less towards the course. A lot of them state you know they are just coming back to college. You know to get that background on how long they've been out of school, what their goal is, why they are taking the class...I do think it's important to find out who you're going to be teaching in each section and find out what you can do to sort of tailor that section to that particular class. I find the Journal of Adult Education is a good resource. One of the community colleges I worked at

actually had professional development just on teaching adult learners. (John, W, M, CC)

Another participant, Mark, although admittedly unfamiliar with adult learning theory shared this belief that educators must get to know who is in their classroom in order to adapt to their needs. And like John, he gathered background information from his returning adult students. However, Mark noted that in addition to other questions, he also asked about race, ethnicity, and gender:

I'd ask about background, family, jobs they've had—I'd start off on almost the first day. I have to change information based on who's in the classroom-learning quickly from their experience or background. I didn't learn from workshops or orientations—I looked at it based on the race, ethnicity, and gender of the class. On the satellite campus, it was predominantly Black and women, so it was really interesting seeing those dynamics. (Mark, B, M, 4S)

**Race, gender, and family culture.** Having such a diverse group of participants was valuable in that it allowed for voices to emerge and share experiences about how their race, gender, and upbringing has had a direct impact on how they interact with their students. This researcher has already provided a few quotes from other participants who discussed race, gender, and/or upbringing when discussing their teaching approaches. This was an unexpected yet vital finding (4 of 17 <23%>). Two participants conveyed how their race influenced their ability to adapt to the needs of their returning adult students.

Sandra explained her background as an African American student in a predominantly White institution. And when educating returning adult students who are in a similar situation, she finds that she can relate to them, which influences the way she teaches.

I've been in this field for over 30 years and honestly because the majority of the students in the classes were African American in a predominantly white



institution so I could relate to them because I went to a predominantly white institution as an undergrad and came up in an era which you know and I think it's probably still true to this day, I knew I had to really kind of do let's say do double the work for people to know that I did know what I was talking about cause I went to undergrad in the '70s. That really guides the way I teach. (Sandra, B, F, CC)

Mary, also explained how being Black influenced the way she interacted with her students. Like Sandra she finds that she can relate to her students, specifically those from vulnerable populations. Unlike Sandra, she expressed how not only her race, but also her gender, professional experience, background in education, and upbringing have helped her adapt to the needs of her returning adult students.

I think that my ability to teach students is a combination of having lived in the environment in which I've had to teach. I've had to navigate it as somebody of a vulnerable population, both as female and as a Black person. And, outside of that, being involved with leadership and having to communicate the needs of the students, so there's a consciousness that kind of arose through time, and practice, and experience. And my undergrad is in early childhood education, pre-K to three, and then reading, pre-K-3, and then special education. And then, the other part of that is the way that I was raised. I watched my mother and my grandmother really take time to hear people, and to understand who they were interacting with before they acted. When I'm in a class - it's not, oh, well this is what I did last year, so this is what I'm gon' do this year. (Mary, B, F, 4S)

### **Finding #5**

*The majority of participants (15 of 17 <88%>) were able to review their course evaluations and found the responses to open-ended questions most helpful. However, in comparison, several participants (13 of 17 <76%>) found that informal methods of evaluations were much more valuable and had a bigger influence on whether they modified their teaching approaches.*

**No access to course evaluations.** When discussing how participants assess the effectiveness of their teaching approaches, most explained informal methods that they incorporated. What was extremely surprising, however, was that for two participants these informal methods were all they had to go by. When the topic of course evaluations arose Angie (B, F, 4S) stated, “I have no idea of what the institution did with them. I did find it odd that there was nothing from the college back to us.”

Don had a similar experience to Angie, except he also mentions that most students don’t complete the formal online surveys anyway. As a result, he stated that he surveys his students on a regular basis in order to gather their feedback and then utilizes that feedback to adjust his teaching approaches.

I don’t usually have access to those things and the turnout of those is not good. Students are sent emails so they do things online. So, the students that actually answer the surveys online, yeah, a very marginal percentage. So, I survey them on a regular basis to find specific practices that they find useful and specific practices that they find not so useful, some things in which they said was actually helpful that helped me understand things, that helped me improve and move forward in my skills or my understanding or there’s ones actually where those didn’t help. (Don, H, M, CC)

It’s important to add that these two participants were both adjunct instructors so that does not excuse, but that may account for the lack of access to formal feedback.

**Flawed evaluation process.** Although he was able to view the results of his course evaluation, one participant felt like Don and considered the process to still be very flawed. Therefore, he looked for trends in responses rather than isolated comments. He then used those trends to make modifications if needed.

I have pedagogical issues with the formal ones, because they ask questions that students, generally aren’t equipped to answer well, like how effective was the test, or how effective was this assignment? They have no clue. Like, either they liked it or didn’t like it, but that doesn’t mean they know anything about the effectiveness

of these things, right?...usually what I focus on is those little write-in sections where students have the chance to write their criticisms, both good and bad. And what I try and look for are not so much isolated comments, but any kind of trend that starts to appear, like, if, you know, 60% of the comments are saying this exam was just way too hard or something, then I'll take a look at it again and think- was this a fair exam, or should I have done something different? It also just depends on the response rate, too, cause we're moving to online systems, now...And, response rate has gone down to getting a little bit of a more biased view of, sort of people who either loved it or hated it and want to comment, and everyone else kinda gets left out. (Rob, W, M, 4S)

**Open-ended responses on formal evaluations.** The comments were the aspect that participants paid the most attention to when reviewing course evaluations. This was noted by Rob when he referred to paying attention to the “write-in sections.” This did not always mean that they would modify their teaching approaches as a result, but they still spent the most time reviewing those responses.

It might sound crazy, but I like the comments. I want to see what students are going to take time to write...I really want to know what the students are sharing and what they have to say. I think that's important. Students will say they like the fact that I connect with them. And the least, speaking in front of the class. That's the least, that I always get. But I have not modified it, at all. Not at all. (Gill, B, M, 4S)

Sarah also focuses on the comments and sees the value in them, except unlike Gill, she uses them to modify her teaching approaches. She also commented on the quantitative section of the evaluations. Like Rob, she looks for trends.

That's where I find the most valuable information is when people will say, I really liked that you did this, I didn't like this, maybe next time you should try doing it this way. And there have been times when I have adapted things based on the feedback. I do also look at the generated numbers and mean scores that come across, and that can be meaningful if there's something that is low. (Sarah, W, F, 4S)

**Unsolicited feedback.** Another participant stated that she saw how course evaluations could be helpful but did not find them as helpful as what she referred to as unsolicited feedback. She finds more value in the unprompted suggestions or

conversations during office hours. It's that type of feedback that leads her to modify her teaching approaches.

To be honest with you, I pay a lot more attention to unsolicited student feedback, that's not in the evaluation. An email, a conversation, something someone says during office hours, a letter after the semester is over. Students saying, "I wish we had talked more about this topic," or students saying "This was really great for me. This worked really well," or "I like it when you do this in class." Those, I pay a lot of attention to. And I ask questions, any time I get the chance. Like whenever students disclose something. I had students this semester who were like "I have ADHD." As someone with ADHD, what works really well for you in the classroom? What doesn't work well? What have you liked, that other teachers have done?" That is the feedback that I am actually incorporating. I don't feel like teaching evaluations are generally that helpful, as those conversations or emails, or letters. (Nell, W, F, 4S)

**Empowering adult students through feedback collection.** Two participants who value the informal feedback they gather from students explained how this is something they have found to be empowering for their returning adult students. In that time of gathering feedback from adult students, the students become the expert and gain power. Annie explained that in her courses, she tells her returning adult students that their feedback can help improve the course or possibly the program. Afterwards, she relays their feedback to her colleagues.

The students give me feedback. I always, especially with adult learners ask what worked for you, what didn't work for you? May not change whether you liked it in the course or didn't like it in the course, but it may help you or somebody else who takes this course. But that way they feel they have a part in it too, in improving the program. I take notes, and I tell them up front, I'm taking notes. Some of the things you suggest will be happening, some won't. And then I share the feedback with the faculty, or my course moderator. (Annie, W, F, CC)

John also explained how gathering feedback from students provides retuning adult students with a sense of authority in the classroom. However, he believes that students will only provide feedback on his teaching approaches after they have formed what is

similar to a therapeutic alliance with him. Essentially, there must be trust and sense of mutual respect before returning adult students will share their suggestions.

In the clinical world of psych there is this concept called alliance. You're talking about the client therapist relationship and I think that works well also with faculty. If you develop sort of an alliance with the students in the class, especially adults who, again, understand there is a power differential. They're in a position where they may have authority, it might be parents, family, supervisors and now they're sitting in a room and now there is someone else who's in charge, that can be very intimidating and I think if you give them some of that choice and that power back in the class and help them shape the learning they're going to experience, it helps, and once you get that rapport going they'll give me the feedback. They tell me whether or not they like something. (John, W, M, CC)

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the five findings uncovered by this study. Findings were organized according to the research questions. Data from individual in-depth interviews revealed research participants' beliefs regarding teaching traditional students vs. returning adult students as well as provided a never before seen view into the satellite campus. As is customary in qualitative research, extensive samples of quotations from participants are included in this chapter. By using the actual words of the participants, the researcher aims to build the confidence of readers by accurately representing the reality of the persons and situations studied.

The primary finding of this study is that the satellite campus environment poses (posed) challenges to participants. This finding emanated from the expressed descriptions of 100% of participants who identified themselves as having had experience teaching returning adult students on a satellite campus of a four-year institution. When discussing the satellite campus, participants shared the struggles of working with vulnerable

populations, at times without the needed resources on hand. Participants revealed the adjustments they made to their course to accommodate the needs of the commuting students with demanding outside responsibilities. In addition, they modified their class schedules to allow students to spend more time on campus and feel like a part of the college community. One participants spoke of being treated negatively in comparison to those on the main campus.

The second finding was that the majority of the participants stated that returning adult students should not be taught in the same manner as traditional students. It was stated that returning adult students had more life experience, more outside responsibilities, and were more motivated than traditional students. This finding was interesting in that some participants who held the belief that they should not be taught in the same manner stated that they did not change their teaching approaches when making the shift from teaching traditional to teaching returning adult students. The overall consensus for those who did not change was because they were utilizing teaching approaches that were effective no matter the age of the group. Then there were a few participants who held strong that class culture, learning styles, and the student as an individual should determine the teaching approaches not age.

The third finding was that the main challenges of the returning adult student were social role conflict and time management. These issues overlapped in that students struggled to find the time to be both a good student and take care of their duties as a parent, son/daughter, employee, significant other, and so on. Understanding these challenges caused participants to be more lenient and flexible especially with deadlines. However, participants described trying to find the balance between being flexible and

maintaining rigor. Some participants described how the multiple social roles lent itself to life experiences that could be an asset in the classroom especially during class discussion, but at times life experience was an obstacle to learning when students could not see past their life experience when learning new theories. A few participants shared their personal challenges when educating returning adult students; struggles with credibility when the student has more personal experience than the instructor in a subject being taught and uncertainty about how to address students in a respectful manner when the instructor finds herself younger than her students.

The fourth finding was that some participants had formal education/training in adult learning theory, but the vast majority stated that more informal means guided their teaching approaches and how they adapted to the challenges of returning adult students. These informal means varied. Two participants held graduate degrees in adult education and one participant took courses in adult learning theory as part of a doctoral program. Most participants either learned how to adapt to the challenges of returning adults students either by way of professional development, professional experience, intuition, or personal experience as an adult student. Two participants explained how their professional experience led them to be more flexible and adaptable educators. Other participants expressed that talking to their returning adult students was the way they learned to adapt to their needs, and also understanding that those needs will vary based on who is in the classroom from one semester to the next. The most unexpected and vital aspect of this finding was hearing how the race and gender of the educator influenced how they adapted to the needs of their students.

The fifth finding was that the majority of participants were able to review their formal course evaluations and found the responses to open-ended questions most helpful. However, in comparison, several participants found that informal methods of evaluations were much more valuable and had a bigger influence on whether they modified their teaching approaches. When discussing how participants assess the effectiveness of their teaching approaches, most explained informal methods that they incorporated. What was extremely surprising, however, was that for two participants these informal methods were all they had to go by. Their students completed course evaluations, but they did not have access to the results. Most participants said the aspect of the formal course evaluations they spent the most attention to was the comments. They felt they were valuable and, in some cases, educators changed their teaching approaches as a result of the comments where others made no modifications. What was stated by a few participants was that the evaluations are flawed and should be improved, also the response rate has become lower since most institutions have moved to electronic evaluations therefore leaving those who either loved or hated the course/professor providing feedback. So instead of looking at isolated comments, participants found themselves paying more attention to trends. Several participants saw the informal feedback they received either in an email, during office hours, after class, or in an in-class survey (they created) to be more valuable than formal course evaluations. And two participants noted that for the returning adult students, having the opportunity to share their thoughts about the course with the professor was empowering especially when they were able to see that their feedback motivated change.



## Chapter V

### ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

There is a wealth of adult education literature pointing to the disadvantages of using traditional teaching methods with returning adult students. And there is a great deal of literature that provides educators of adults with effective alternatives for teaching returning adult students. However, in my thorough search of various databases such as ERIC, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Premier (journal articles, eBooks, textbooks, etc.), there was little to no literature, which explained what is actually taking place in the classroom on satellite campuses of four-year institutions. This study sought to shed light on what teaching approaches faculty members were utilizing in their classrooms with returning adult students. It wasn't known if they were sticking with the methods that had commonly been used with traditional students or if they were using methods that are aligned with adult learning principles as adult education literature suggests. With the projection of a continued increase in the number of returning adult students, it would be valuable if this problem is addressed and that is what this study sought to do.

The study was based on the following research questions:

1. What differences (if any) do participants perceive between traditional and returning adult students?
2. To what extent do participants change their teaching approaches to meet the needs of the returning adult student?
  - a. How do participants learn to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student?

b. What principles (if any) do participants draw on when trying to meet the needs of the returning adult student?

### **Analysis & Interpretation**

#### **Research Question 1: What differences (if any) do participants perceive between traditional and returning adult students?**

The first research question sought to determine if participants perceived any differences between traditional students and returning adult students. This study indicates that faculty recognize that there are differences between traditional and returning adult students. Finding 2 (*13 of 17 <76%>*) showed that participants believe returning adult students have unique needs. When distinguishing them from traditional students: development, life experience, outside responsibilities, and motivation were the most frequently mentioned differences. Finding 3 brought attention to the various challenges faced by returning adult students. All participants expressed that both social role conflict and time management were overlapping issues specific to this group (as opposed to their younger counterparts). Other challenges mentioned were health issues and lack of confidence in academic abilities.

This study suggests that faculty believe returning adult students are a unique population of learners who differ in various ways from traditional students. They see returning adult students as more motivated because they have chosen to return to school whereas traditional students are doing what could be described as a next step in development (i.e. graduate from high school and go to college). Therefore, there is an indication that this is something that returning adult students want to do (internal

motivation) vs. something they feel required to do. Even when discussing the various challenges that returning adults face, there appeared to be this belief that these challenges are not also faced by traditional students or not on the same level. Returning adult students are seen as: parents who have to also take care of children, daughters/sons caring for elderly parents, employees trying to juggle work/home/school life responsibilities, and their biggest challenge of all appears to be how they will find the time to do it all. On the other hand, this study indicates that faculty see traditional students as having fewer responsibilities and therefore more time to focus on school.

This was consistent with adult learning literature. According to Ritt (2008), adult students have barriers that can make it very difficult to return to college. These barriers can be *personal*, *professional*, or *institutional*. Some examples of *personal* barriers are: family commitments, lack of childcare, or general fear of returning to school. A *professional* barrier would be relevant to adult students who are employed. An example is not receiving any form of tuition reimbursement from their employer, which can cause them to bear a financial burden. An *institutional* barrier deals more with the actual college/university than the student himself. An example of an institutional barrier is the high cost of education (i.e. rising costs of tuition and fees). On a daily basis, educators of adults are expected to openly acknowledge these and other barriers and work with adult students to help them tackle these barriers.

Also, in line with the findings of this study is research conducted by Day et al. (2011). They asked participants to provide characteristics of adult learners.

The participants in this study perceived adult students as tenacious—being more committed to their education, more focused, and harder working in their classes. One participant stated that the older learners he had in class are more

persistent, more tenacious, and more dedicated because if they were not, they would not have come back to school. Participants also talked about adult students' abilities to multitask, to juggle their many life roles in addition to their student role. They also perceived that while adult learners are typically prepared to devote themselves to study, specific study skills and confidence in the classroom might be lacking, and thus a final subtheme emerged related to the duality of adult learners' preparedness. (Day et al., 2011, p. 79)

This idea of preparedness came up in this study as well. It is implied that returning adult students are more motivated because they have been away from school and now feel ready to work. However, what happens when they return is a refresher is needed because for some it has been over 20 years and technology has changed or in some cases has been invented. Many are not accustomed to using the internet to search for resources. Their writing usually needs to be refined. The way they studied for exams in high school may not translate into studying in college. Also, when they were in high school they most likely did not have children, a significant other, and/or a career in addition to trying to be a successful student. This leads to another challenge that emerged during this study, which was lack of confidence in academic abilities specifically in older female students (50 years of age and older) who have been away from school much longer.

Although returning adult students tend to need refreshers and refinement in some areas, this study suggests that their overall academic abilities are not lower than traditional students. In fact, this study indicates that unlike traditional students, returning adult students have accumulated life experiences that can be valuable to them in the classroom, enriching classroom discussion and assignments. Overall, faculty appear to see life experience as a positive, but the study also indicates that in some cases life experience can be a barrier especially when the experience is in opposition to a theory the returning adult student is attempting to learn. This was also shown in the literature.

According to Knowles et al. (2012), having more life experience can have negative effects because as returning adult students accumulate experience they tend to develop mental habits, biases, and beliefs that tend to cause them to close their minds to new ideas, current perceptions, and alternative ways of thinking.

Based on the aforementioned information educators of returning adults face a dilemma: do they change their teaching approaches when teaching returning adult students or utilize the same teaching approaches used with traditional students? This study indicates that faculty are aware of the challenges of the returning adult student and how that can affect their learning. However, that knowledge does not always translate into a change in teaching approaches.

**Research Question 2: To what extent do participants change their teaching approaches to meet the needs of the returning adult student?**

The second research question sought to determine if participants changed their teaching approaches to meet the needs of returning adult students. Revisiting findings #1 and #2, it is indicated that faculty recognize that returning adult students are different than traditional students. Faculty (*17 of 17 <100%>*) believe returning adult students face challenges that traditional students do not and as a result this study suggests that educators of returning adults believe these two groups should not be taught in the same manner. Therefore, when making the shift from teaching traditional students to teaching returning adult students, most (*13 of 17 <76%>*) change their teaching approaches. However, when looking back into literature from over 20 years ago, this researcher found that there has been a shift in how faculty perceive and teach returning adult students.

**Evolving perspectives.** Kasworm (1990) conducted a review of past research perspectives of adult undergraduates in higher education. The article states:

Some of the studies presumed that there was a covert, if not overt, prejudice towards the adult student. Other studies implied that there was a lack of awareness by collegiate personnel; thus, the findings of these studies would redirect the collegiate environment in meeting the identified needs of the adult student. It was assumed that collegiate institutions did not recognize the unique difficulties and needs of the adult student. Studies attempted to gain greater insights into the specific dynamics of role conflicts as they might influence the adult in a student role. Differences in role conflict were examined for women reentry students and their families (Hooper, 1979), between male and female reentry students (Gilbert, Manning, & Ponder, 1980; Gilbert & Holahan, 1982), and between professional and nonprofessional women groupings (Beutell & O'Hare, 1987). Studies reported more significant role conflict among female reentry students than among male reentry students. There were also differing role conflicts when comparing professional and nonprofessional women in student roles and when comparing family coping styles in relation to the wife/mother's student role involvement. (Kasworm, 1990, p. 361)

Lynch and Bishop-Clark (1998) conducted a study where they compared the returning adult student's experience on a main campus vs a satellite campus. Within this article, they like Kasworm (1990) reviewed early literature to examine the past perceptions of adult students. Lynch and Bishop-Clark found the following:

Groves and Groves (1980) argued that faculty had little experience with older adults and Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) reported faculty would be reluctant to teach courses geared for adults. Some noted that faculty felt this group was anti-intellectual, overly practical, and resistant to change (David, 1979; Hughes, 1983). Faculty feared that adults would be on the fringes of academic life due to the demands on their time (Holtzclaw, 1980) and that they would lower academic standards because they lacked the requisite skills necessary for college learning (Miller, 1989). Kasworm (1990) reports that faculty members' fears of decline in academic standards were perpetual, and research findings substantiate that professors do not alter their expectations or change their teaching styles in response to the participation of adults in their classrooms. (p. 218)

As is the case with so many aspects of life, some things change while others remain the same. This was shown in a UK/Belgian study conducted in 2001. Lecturers

were asked to discuss their teaching methods when returning adult students are among traditional undergraduates. Most reported that they did not modify their teaching style if an adult was in the group. One lecturer stated that he did not know why adult students needed different methods (Merrill, 2001). That way of thinking is similar to that of the earlier perspectives. However, another lecturer in the study noted that he did modify his style when educating returning adult students. He noted that he moved more toward group work and seminar discussion teaching (Merrill, 2001). That lecturer's change in teaching approaches fell more in line with the current perspectives on adult learning. According to Kenner and Weinerman (2011), by understanding what makes adult learners different from traditional students, educators can provide specific tools that help adult learners integrate into the college or university environment and increase their chances for success.

In this research study, the findings indicate that there has been a change in the perspectives of the adult student and therefore a shift in how faculty educate adult learners. This research suggests that faculty change teaching approaches in order to address the challenges faced by the returning adult student and/or appeal to the unique needs of the adult learner. The biggest challenge noted was time management and understanding that returning adult students have demanding outside responsibilities that will be in conflict with their education.

This perspective of the returning adult student may be a result of the wealth of literature available on adult learning theory, which some participants noted they keep up to date with. The findings may mean that faculty have changed their perspective of the returning adult student over the years or it may be due to the characteristics of this

study's sample. Unlike most studies that focus either on faculty who teach returning adult students or on returning adult students themselves, this research focuses on faculty who taught on satellite campuses where adult students were the majority in the classroom. Even the community college participants in this study had to currently or previously teach a course where returning adult students were the majority in the classroom (usually evening or weekend courses). Lynch and Bishop-Clark (1998) conducted a research study where they compared the returning adult student's experience on a main campus to their experience on a satellite campus (of the same university). Their results suggested that earlier works that showed faculty with negative attitudes towards teaching returning adult students appeared to be unfounded at least in environments where adults were a significant percentage of the campus population. This sentiment was echoed in a more recent study conducted by Brinthaupt and Eady (2014) with 171 faculty members from community colleges and regional universities. They examined faculty members' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors towards returning adult students and they also found that their participants held positive attitudes and perceptions of their returning adult students. According to Brinthaupt and Eady,

The colleges used here have large percentages of adult learners and a wide variety of class schedule offerings and course delivery options for those students. We would expect that the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of teachers in institutions with fewer adult learners are likely to be less favorable than those reported in this study. (p. 139)

This study suggests that faculty are more lenient with deadlines with returning adult students. They are flexible when it comes to assignments yet are determined to remain fair and maintain rigor. At times faculty adjust the assignment itself to make it more manageable for the returning adult student to complete. For example, instead of



having a large project due at the end of the semester, faculty might break it up into smaller pieces with different sections due throughout the semester. This benefits the student in more ways than one. It not only provides them with a more manageable schedule, it also gives them more opportunities to receive feedback from their instructors. Unlike this research study, Lynch and Bishop-Clark's (1998) research suggested that adults students who attended the main campus along with traditional students did not believe faculty were utilizing the life experience that they brought to the classroom. In line with those results, Brinthaupt and Eady (2014) found that although faculty had positive attitudes and perceptions of returning adult students, they still treated their returning adult students similarly to their traditional students. Since it was a quantitative study, participants weren't able to provide the reasoning behind their responses.

**Knowles' theoretical framework.** The literature states that when adults participate in a positive learning experience that follows the six assumptions of andragogy presented by Knowles, they are more likely to retain what they have learned and apply it in their work environment (Ota et al., 2006). When listing the six assumptions, Knowles et al. (2012) provided some insight on the need to use certain experiential techniques (i.e., nontraditional teaching methods) when educating adults:

Greater emphasis in adult education is placed on individualization of teaching and learning strategies...the richest resources for learning reside in the adult learners themselves. Hence, the emphasis in adult education is on experiential techniques— techniques that tap into the experience of the learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques. Also, greater emphasis is placed on peer-helping activities. (p. 76)

In some ways this study is in agreement with this literature, faculty appear to be using more experiential techniques in the classroom such as group discussion and case methods

with returning adult students. However, something else that was stated in the aforementioned quote was having an emphasis on individualized teaching strategies (i.e. tailoring instruction based on the learner). Only a few participants stated that they focused more on individualized teaching strategies. And these were the faculty who expressed that they did not change their teaching approaches when teaching returning adult students because their focus was more on learning styles and the individual rather than the age of their students. Adult education literature states that instructors should recognize that adults have different learning styles and therefore instruction should be tailored to the characteristic ways that adults prefer to learn (Collins, 2004). It is possible that others also used individualized teaching strategies but did not report due to the researcher not directly asking about it.

According to Brookfield (2013), when it comes to adult learners, it's plainly ludicrous to talk about teaching adults as if all adults across the planet represent a monolithic, generic category for which we can generate standardized techniques. There are several variables involved that need to be considered such as: readiness for learning, racial identity, previous experiences, and learning style. However, Brookfield does agree with the view of several other adult learning theorists (e.g., Knowles, 1980; Mezirow, 1991) that one aspect of the adult learner that is generally true for all is life experience, just from the idea that the longer you are here (on this planet) the more experiences you accumulate.

Participants in this study were asked to rate how frequently they used various teaching methods with returning adult students. There was a mixture of traditional and nontraditional methods listed (Table 5 & Table 6).

This study indicates that faculty are utilizing various methods of instruction including media and technology, which was not listed. They are combining methods that are seen as traditional such as lecture with more nontraditional methods like group discussion. Participants described using both small and large group discussion. Small group discussion was described most times as being used during a class activity (e.g., five groups of four are each provided with a discussion question to answer as a group) whereas large group discussion was usually used in combination with lecture (e.g., teaching about parenting styles and inviting students provide examples of their style or the styles their parents used). This study implies that in order to explain terms and theories, faculty believe a certain amount of lecture is needed, but because they are aware of the life experience returning adult students bring into the classroom, they incorporate experiential techniques as well such as group discussion. Group discussion allows to students make better connections to the material by relating it to their personal lives. According to Worth and Stephens (2011), educators of adults should encourage students to enhance basic course content with anecdotes from the working world.

Table 5

*Teaching Methods: Nontraditional-Often (3) or Always (4)*

<b>4-Year Institution-Satellite Campus Participants</b>									
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Activity</b>								
	GD	RP	PE	PBL	CM	SE	SDL	CL	TSLE
1) Mark	X		X		X		X	X	
2) Gill	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
3) Jordan	X		X		X		X	X	X
4) James	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
5) Mary	X		X		X		X		X
6) Angie					X				
7) Porsha	X		X	X			X		X
8) Nell	X		X	X	X			X	
9) Sarah	X	X	X			X	X	X	
10) Rob	X			X	X		X	X	
TOTAL	9 (90%)	2 (20%)	8 (80%)	4 (40%)	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	8 (80%)	6 (60%)	5 (50%)
<b>Community College Participants</b>									
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Activity</b>								
	GD	RP	PE	PBL	CM	SE	SDL	CL	TSLE
11) Lisa	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
12) Sandra	X			X		X	X	X	X
13) Dawn	X	X	X		X			X	
14) Sally	X		X	X	X		X	X	
15) Annie	X	X		X	X		X	X	
16) John	X		X		X		X		X
17) Don	X		X	X	X			X	X
TOTAL	7 (100%)	3 (43%)	5 (71%)	5 (71%)	6 (86%)	1 (41%)	5 (71%)	6 (86%)	3 (43%)

*Note.* GD=Group Discussion; RP=Role Play; PE=Personal Experience; PBL=Project-based Learning; CM=Case Methods; SE=Simulation Exercises; SDL=Self-directed Learning; CL=Cooperative Learning; TSLE=Treat Students Like Experts

Table 6

*Teaching Methods: Traditional-Often (3) or Always (4)*

**4-Year Institution-Satellite Campus Participants**

Participant	Activity		
	Lecture	PowerPoint/Other Presentation Slides	Memorize Terms, Concepts, and or Other Theories
1) Mark			X
2) Gill	X	X	X
3) Jordan	X		X
4) James	X	X	
5) Mary	X		
6) Angie	X		X
7) Porsha	X	X	
8) Nell	X	X	X
9) Sarah	X	X	X
10) Rob	X	X	X
TOTAL	9 (90%)	6 (60%)	7 (70%)

**Community College Participants**

Participant	Activity		
	Lecture	PowerPoint/Other Presentation Slides	Memorize Terms, Concepts, and or Other Theories
11) Lisa			X
12) Sandra	X	X	
13) Dawn			X
14) Sally	X		
15) Annie		X	
16) John		X	
17) Don	X	X	
TOTAL	3 (43%)	4 (57%)	2 (29%)

Educators might be advised to put aside the PowerPoint slides and instead use the power of project-based learning and various cooperative learning techniques to get the learners actively involved in constructing their own learning (Fenwick, 2003).

PowerPoint or other slide presentations (traditional method) were used frequently by study participants, but after further probing, the researcher found that faculty appear to be using it more often as a way to display images rather than display actual information. This research also suggests PowerPoint is being used as a way for faculty to stay on track with the class agenda, providing cues of which topics to cover and when. This study suggests that faculty are moving farther and farther away from using PowerPoint and other slide presentations as a means to present course material, especially when educating returning adult students. Nontraditional methods that were used by very few participants were: role-play, simulation exercises, and treating the student like an expert.

It was slightly surprising considering the sample that role play and simulation exercises weren't used more. When asked why they didn't use role-play some stated that they simply didn't like it, while others explained that it was not a good fit based on the subject matter taught. Quite a few participants asked what the researcher meant by simulation exercises, once explained, most stated that they did not use it. Another reason provided for not using simulation exercises was that some admittedly had not thought to use it in their classrooms but seemed encouraged to try new methods with their returning adult students.

This research suggests that faculty do not treat returning adult students like experts because regardless of the age and experience of the student, faculty still see themselves as the ones with the most knowledge on the subject being taught and therefore

consider themselves the experts. This is in disagreement with adult learning literature which states that many returning adult students may know more than the instructor on certain topics, and the life experiences they possess can enrich the classroom as a whole. Thus, the classroom dynamics have changed, with the most successful educators tapping into adult students' body of knowledge (Graham et al., 2000). One of the personal challenges that emerged with one participant was this notion that he would not be seen as credible to his returning adult students in a family studies course because he didn't have the same experiences as them. As he said it, "he knew it scholarly, but not experientially." He was unmarried with no children and teaching those at times who were married and/or parents. When faced with this challenge he was advised by mentors and colleagues to utilize the experiences of the students when teaching; over the course of his time teaching he accumulated several anecdotes from students that could then be used when explaining different topics. This allowed him to maintain his role as the subject matter expert in the room.

It appears that faculty are allowing returning adult students to use their life experience in the course via group discussion, but still maintain their role as expert in the classroom. Something interesting that was stated by Jordan was, "they are the experts of their own experiences, but not necessarily of the course material." And this is most likely the reason why faculty maintain their stance as expert rather than shifting that power to their returning adult students. Students may be the experts on their own lives and experiences, but that does not make them the expert on the material being taught.

Educators of returning adult students appear to be changing their teaching approaches to address the challenges and meet the needs of the returning adult students, utilizing a combination of traditional and nontraditional methods to do so. But the

question still stands of how did they learn to adapt to the needs of their returning adult students? Did they study adult learning theory? Were they adult learners themselves? Or are they simply doing what feels right? The next section attempts to answer these questions and more.

**Research Questions 2a and 2b: How do participants learn to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student? What principles (if any) do participants draw on when trying to meet the needs of the returning adult student?**

Two research sub-questions sought to determine how participants learned to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student and what principles (if any) they draw on when trying to meet the needs of the returning adult student. According to King and Lawler (2003), in many cases faculty have had little or no training in working with adult learners. They themselves come from diverse backgrounds, educational experiences, and cultural contexts. Their charge is to promote learning and change in the adults they teach. They work in complex organizations and may find support for their endeavors in their organizations or they may find that they are on their own as they set out to teach and train their adult students.

Understanding the principles of adult learning can help educators become better facilitators of learning (Collins, 2004). Finding 4 states that some participants (*3 of 17 < 17%>*) in the study had some formal education/training in adult learning theory such as a graduate degree or graduate coursework in adult education. However, more informal means guide faculty's thinking and how they adapt to the challenges of returning adult students. This study suggests that faculty with either a graduate degree or graduate coursework in adult education used/use what they've learned to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student. However, this research indicates that most faculty (*14 of 17 < 82%>*) do not have formal education or training in adult learning theory and therefore



have had to learn to adapt to the needs of returning adult students in more informal ways such as through: professional experience, personal experience as an adult learner, speaking to adult students, race, gender, and/or. upbringing.

**Formal vs. informal.** As stated previously, the literature reflects the idea that faculty tend to have little to no training teaching adults. However, what is not discussed much in the literature is how those with no training learn to adapt to the needs of their returning adult students if they're not drawing from an educational background in adult education. This research study suggests that in the absence of formal education in adult learning theory, faculty are quite resourceful when adapting to the needs of their returning adult students. Some participants have had professional experience where they have had to teach various types of populations and therefore consider themselves to be flexible. They are accustomed to modifying teaching approaches based on their audience and those skills transferred into the classroom when educating returning adults at a college or university. Some faculty refer back to their own experience as an adult learner either undergraduate or graduate school; they recall how challenging it was to juggle the responsibilities of working a full-time job and completing assignments in a timely manner. This appears to create some level of empathy, which causes them to be more lenient with deadlines.

This study indicates that faculty think the best way to find out what their returning adult students' needs are (and adapt) is to speak to their students. This goes back to the notion that they are the experts of themselves. Some faculty in this study ask students a series of background questions in the first few class sessions to gather information about who is in the room. Those questions range from is this your first semester to what jobs

have you held? This appears to get faculty away from making assumptions about who their students are and what they need. Instead this leads them in a direction of tailoring instruction based on the individuals. This is also connected to Finding 5, which showed that participants preferred open-ended comments on formal course evaluations but found informal feedback from students to be much more valuable. This informal feedback is given by way of conversations: in class, immediately after class, during office hours, and via email. Students tell their instructors what is and isn't working for them. And this study suggests that faculty are more likely to modify their teaching approaches as a result of this type of feedback. In general, this research indicates that returning adult students take more ownership of their learning than traditional students and therefore are more likely to be forthcoming with concerns and suggestions. It appears that these concerns and suggestions assist faculty in adapting to the needs of their returning adult students.

It can also be assumed that the personal characteristics of the instructor will determine whether or not a student feels comfortable enough to speak openly with them. One interview question asked what course evaluations have revealed as what returning adult students like most and least about the instructor and/or the course. With this sample, being approachable or down to earth came up often as personal characteristics that students liked most. Therefore, it's possible that the faculty in this sample would see more informal feedback and speaking to students as holding value because based on their personal characteristics they are more likely to have those types of interactions with their students.

**Upbringing.** It was no surprise that faculty noted they learned to adapt to their returning adult students based on the way they were raised. An individual usually

acquires their values from their family. In many professions, employees bring their personal values into their workplace. If their personal values are aligned with their professional values and the mission of the organization then they can serve as an asset to the employee (and the people they serve if applicable). This research indicates that faculty learn from their upbringing how to adapt to the needs of returning adult students. This is most likely because this is how they learned to interact with people in general. Values such as listening to someone rather than making an assumption about who they are and treating everyone with respect can be effective with various populations including returning adult students.

A challenge that one participant had was having been raised in an Eastern culture, she was taught that elders should be treated with respect. A form of respect was to not address elders by their first name. This participant found that when she taught on a satellite campus her returning adult students at times were older than her. The dilemma then became whether she should hold to her values and refer to them as Miss or Mister or did she maintain her role as the authority figure in the room and have them all refer to her as Dr. while she addressed them by their first names. She admitted that she still struggled with this and still had not found a solution she was fully comfortable with. This could be a dilemma that younger faculty from various cultural backgrounds struggle with and might be an interesting topic for further study.

**Race & gender.** According to King and Lawler (2003), it is essential to understand how social and cultural contexts influence education. Whether we consider the gender and racial biases that have challenged teachers of adults or address access issues for opportunities, equipment, materials, and technology, we need to reflect

critically on our assumptions and their ethnocentric biases. In this research study more than half of the participants were people of color (nine Black/African-American and one Hispanic). This diversity was valuable in that it allowed for voices to emerge and share experiences about how their race has had a direct impact on how they interact with their students. This was an unprompted yet vital finding that arose within Finding 4. Although there are quite a few studies that examine a faculty of color's experience when teaching at a predominantly White institution, this researcher could not find any that focused specifically on educators of returning adult students. Therefore, these results have the potential to add to adult learning literature by exhibiting the perspectives of faculty of color whom educate returning adult students.

This unexpected finding suggests that:

- Faculty of color appear to be mindful of the race/ethnicity of their students in their course and utilize that information to individualize their teaching approaches.
- Black or African American female faculty fall under the category of vulnerable populations, a category that many of the returning adult students described in this study fall under as well (specifically those on satellite campuses). Therefore, faculty feel they can relate to their students in a way that their White counterparts may not be able to.
- Faculty of color, more specifically those who identify as Black or African American hold the idea that they have to work twice as hard as their White counterparts. And therefore, feel a sense responsibility to pass on this work ethic to their Black or African-American returning adult students especially those in predominantly White institutions.

Turner, Gonzalez and Wong (2011) explored whether anything has changed since Gratz and Grutter (court cases around the subject of affirmative action). When conducting research with predominantly White research universities, they found that very little has changed for women faculty of color. Faculty described experiences of marginalization, subtle discrimination, racism and institutional racism, gender-bias and institutional sexism, and difficulties with students who do not expect to be taught by women of color.

The above-mentioned list is in line with a research study conducted by Eagan and Garvey (2015) where they examined the connections among race, gender, sources of stress, and productivity in the areas of research, teaching, and service.

Predominantly White institutions provide instances of “multiple forms of discrimination, bias, segregation, and unconscious racism”, and women of color must navigate both sexism and racism in academia. Furthermore, students more frequently question faculty of color’s authority and knowledge in a classroom setting and tokenize their identities. Institutional racism and sexism likely impact campus climate for women and faculty of color in ways that detrimentally influence research, teaching, and service. Harper (2012) has called on scholars to label stress associated with racial discrimination as racism, and he defines racism as “individual actions that engender marginalization and inflict varying degrees of harm on minoritized populations...” (p. 10). Unequal expectations and perceptions among faculty of color that they must work harder to prove themselves to their colleagues represent forms of subtle discrimination that result in higher levels of stress, and the sense of marginalization described by Harper (2012) may further exacerbate stress felt by faculty of color. (p. 926)

On the subject of racism, one participant who identified as a Black female, spoke about the racism she endured when educating White returning adult students. She in no way believed that all of her White students were racist, instead when speaking of the results of her course evaluations from one class she noted that two men were racists. Therefore, this was something she kept in mind when reviewing course evaluations. She could not allow negative comments to hold too much weight because there was an understanding that

those she identified as racist would more than likely provide her with lower scores and negative comments as a result. This participant indicated that she was fine as long as the racist was not outright disrespectful or physically aggressive towards her. The researcher did not probe more into this, but a question that could have been asked (and should be asked in future research) is, “How do faculty of color learn to adapt to the presence of returning adult students who are racist towards them?” Other topics that warrant further research are: how race can influence teaching approaches with returning adult students and how race can impact course evaluations. According to Smith and Hawkins (2011):

there is a relatively small amount of quantitative data from researchers who have explored the effects of race/ethnicity and student evaluations in higher education. Five studies were found that included faculty race/ethnicity (Anderson & Smith, 2005; DiPietro & Faye, 2005; Hameresh & Parker, 2005; Smith, 2007; Smith & Anderson, 2005). However, only one of those included Black faculty. (p. 151)

### **Comparing Satellite Campuses & Community College**

In addition to the research questions something that emerged was the lack of difference between the two groups of participants. There were more differences based on race and gender than location. In a previous section on evolving perspectives, this researcher discussed how the location where the participants educate their returning adult students can make a difference in their perceptions and attitude toward them. In this study the researcher had what could have been perceived as two distinct groups: faculty with experience teaching returning adult students on the satellite campus of a four-year institution and community college faculty who had experience teaching returning adult students.

In line with the literature (Brinthaup & Eady, 2014; Lynch & Bishop-Clark, 1998), these groups may not be that different after all. However, I hypothesize that if I

had included participants from the main campus of a four-year research centered university that had no experience on a satellite campus where adult students were the majority then there more than likely would have been major differences. The groups included in this research study appeared to be more learner centered and this could be a direct result of campus type.

One aspect that stood out were the similarities between how participants from each group described the differences between the returning adult student and the traditional student. The accounts were so similar in some cases, that it could be difficult to distinguish who came from which group. This indicated that the satellite campus environment is very similar to the community college environment, in that it attracts more adult students from vulnerable populations who are very motivated and self-directed, but also have multiple social roles that demand a great deal of their time. In comparison, based on the reported perceptions of the faculty in this study, the same could possibly be said about the traditional student. The traditional student on the main campus of a four-year institution and the traditional student at a community college might also show similarities in terms of being not as motivated as adult learners with little to no outside responsibilities. For the most part, the faculty in this research study saw them as requiring more structure and guidance from faculty when it came to assignments. The responses provided to interview questions overall were so similar across the 2 groups that even the researcher found it difficult at times to remember who was from which group. Therefore, throughout the findings and analysis the groups were not distinguished.

According to O'Brien (2007), non-traditional student populations located at satellite campuses have differing academic, social, psychological, and validation needs

from their on-campus counterparts. Universities need to explore this diversity of nature and implement retention tools to address this diversity. In line with what O'Brien stated, this researcher suggests that future research studies consider focusing on faculty, staff, and returning adults students from satellite campuses. This research suggests that they face unique challenges (*10 of 10 <100%>*) when compared to those on the main campus. It would be interesting to get more perspective on these challenges from different groups on these campuses. And just as was originally stated, there is a need to add more research that focuses on satellite campuses to adult learning literature, preferably some that focus on eliminating or resolving these challenges also referred to as barriers.

### **Chapter Summary**

The first research question sought to determine if participants perceived any differences between traditional students and returning adult students. This study indicates that faculty recognize that there are differences between traditional and returning adult students. This study suggests that faculty believe returning adult students are a unique population of learners who differ in various ways from traditional students. This study indicates that faculty see traditional students as having fewer responsibilities and therefore more time to focus on school. This study indicates that faculty are aware of the challenges of the returning adult student and how that can affect their learning. However, that knowledge does not always translate into a change in teaching approaches.

The second research question sought to determine if participants changed their teaching approaches to meet the needs of returning adult students. It is indicated that faculty (*17 of 17 <100%>*) believe returning adult students face challenges that



traditional students do not and as a result this study suggests that educators of returning adults believe these two groups should not be taught in the same manner. Therefore, when making the shift from teaching traditional students to teaching returning adult students, most (*13 of 17 <76%>*) change their teaching approaches. However, when looking back into literature from over 20 years ago, this researcher found that there has been a shift in how faculty perceive and teach returning adult students. This research appears to show a shift in perspectives from negative to positive. It may show that faculty have changed their perspective of the returning adult student over the years. Or it may be due to the characteristics of this study's sample.

This research study was conducted with Knowles' theoretical framework in mind. Participants responses showed that even without knowledge of Knowles, they still had teaching approaches and beliefs that were aligned with his assumptions. This study compared traditional and returning adult students, but this aspect of emerging adulthood vs early-late adulthood, still caused participants to paint two very different pictures of the student and her/his learning needs. Participants recognized that their students had life experiences that should be utilized in the classroom. They taught using more experiential techniques and recognized that their adult students had various social roles that demanded their time and could be at conflict with their education. Therefore, they were more lenient with deadlines and faculty might break larger projects down into smaller parts. They utilized more nontraditional teaching methods, but at times combined traditional and non-traditional when it seemed necessary. They were using PowerPoint, but only as a way to display images or stay on track with the class agenda. This research suggests that faculty do not treat returning adult students like experts because regardless of the age and

experience of the student, faculty still see themselves as the ones with the most knowledge on the subject being taught. Faculty appear to believe that students may be the experts on their own lives and experiences, but that does not make them the expert on the material being taught.

Two research sub-questions sought to determine how participants learned to adapt to the needs of the returning adult student and what principles (if any) they draw on when trying to meet the needs of the returning adult student. Most faculty (*14 of 17 < 82% >*) do not have formal education or training in adult learning theory and therefore have had to learn to adapt to the needs of returning adult students in more informal ways such as through: professional experience, personal experience as an adult learner, speaking to adult students, race, gender, and/or. upbringing. In general, this research indicates that returning adult students take more ownership of their learning than traditional students and therefore are more likely to be forthcoming with concerns and suggestions. It appears that these concerns and suggestions assist faculty in adapting to the needs of their returning adult students.

It was no surprise that faculty noted they learned to adapt to their returning adult students based on the way they were raised. This research indicates that faculty learn from their upbringing how to adapt to the needs of returning adult students. However, a finding that was unexpected, was how race influenced teaching approaches. Although there are quite a few studies that examine a faculty of color's experience when teaching at a predominantly White institution, this researcher could not find any that focused specifically on educators of returning adult students. Therefore, these results have the

potential to add to adult learning literature by exhibiting the perspectives of faculty of color who educate returning adult students.

In addition to the research questions something that emerged was the lack of difference between the two groups of participants. In this study the researcher had what could have been perceived as two distinct groups: faculty with experience teaching returning adult students on the satellite campus of a four-year institution and community college faculty who had experience teaching returning adult students. One aspect that stood out were the similarities between how participants from each group described the differences between the returning adult student and the traditional student. This indicated that the satellite campus environment is very similar to the community college environment. The responses provided to interview questions overall were so similar across the 2 groups that even the researcher found it difficult at times to remember who was from which group.

## Chapter VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this modified exploratory case study was to explore the teaching approaches of behavioral science faculty members from four-year institutions who either previously taught traditional students and currently teach returning adult students on a satellite campus or who are currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus. Due to the limited number of participants who met the narrow criteria, the study was opened up to include behavioral science faculty members from community colleges as well.

The extent to which participants change their teaching approaches to meet the needs of the returning adult student and if the changes they make reflect Knowles' list of assumptions (a theoretical framework for effectively educating adults) was examined. This study sought to shed light on what teaching approaches faculty members were utilizing in their classrooms with returning adult students. It originally was not known if they were sticking with the methods that had commonly been used with traditional students or if they were using methods that are aligned with adult learning principles as adult education literature suggests. The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and the findings and therefore address three areas: (a) unique challenges that faculty on satellite campuses face; (b) perceived differences between traditional students and returning adult students and how that influences faculty's decision on whether or not

to change teaching approaches; and (c) what guides faculty's teaching approaches and how they adapt to the needs of returning adult students.

### **Conclusion #1: Challenges of Teaching on a Satellite Campus**

The first major finding was that all ten participants from four-year institutions expressed that the satellite campus environment posed challenges. These challenges included: adult students with demanding outside responsibilities, lower education level than students on the main campus, all students are commuters, insufficient on-campus services, and unequal treatment of faculty. The participants in this study have had experience teaching on a main campus as well. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that the satellite campus may be considered the same college/university as the main campus, but it is very much unique as far as the student population and skills required to navigate the various difficulties one might encounter as a faculty member. A related conclusion is that the satellite campus consists mostly if not entirely of returning adult students. Therefore, faculty whom choose to teach on these campuses would need to have an interest in educating adults.

### **Conclusion #2: Perceived Differences between Traditional and Returning Adult Students and Teaching Approaches Utilized**

The second major finding was that the majority of the participants stated that returning adult students should not be taught in the same manner as traditional students. This was connected to the third major finding, which was that when discussing the challenges of the returning adult student, all participants expressed that both social role

conflict and time management were overlapping issues. When distinguishing them from traditional students: development, life experience, outside responsibilities, and motivation were the most frequently mentioned differences. A conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that faculty recognize the differences between traditional and returning adult students. They are conscious of the challenges that their returning adult students face and modify their teaching approaches in order to meet their needs. This includes: being more lenient with deadlines, having flexible attendance policies, and/or utilizing teaching methods that allow students to draw from their life experience.

### **Conclusion #3: How Faculty Learn to Adapt to the Needs of the Returning Adult Student**

The study's fourth finding was that some participants had formal training/education in adult learning theory, but the vast majority stated that more informal means (professional experience, personal experience as an adult learner, race, gender, upbringing, and speaking to adult students) guided their teaching approaches and how they adapted to the challenges of returning adult students. This was connected to the fifth finding, which was that the majority of participants were able to review their course evaluations and found the responses to open-ended questions most helpful. However, in comparison, several participants found that informal methods of evaluations were much more valuable and had a bigger influence on whether they modified their teaching approaches. A conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that regardless of how faculty learn how to adapt to the needs of the returning adult students and no matter what principles guide their thinking, it is important that faculty try to meet their students'

needs. Additionally, whether faculty utilize formal course evaluations or gather feedback informally, feedback from students in any form hold value and can assist faculty in determining how to best modify their teaching approaches.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This study has indicated that the satellite campus environment poses unique challenges. And those challenges seemed unexpected to the faculty who faced them. Now having an idea of the types of challenges that faculty may encounter, it is important to be sure that new faculty are prepared prior to (and while) teaching on a satellite campus. The recommendations that follow are derived from the findings and conclusions of this research study. In summary they all focus on not only gaining more overall awareness of the returning adult student through various avenues, but also learning how to meet the needs of the returning adult student.

Faculty who will be educating returning adult students on a satellite campus or at a community college should:

1. Stay abreast of adult learning literature in order to gain a better understanding (physically, cognitively, socially, etc.) of the returning adult student population and what teaching approaches have shown to be effective with them.
2. Utilize nontraditional teaching methods such as: drawing on the life experience of students, group discussion (small and large), project-based learning, role-play, and other experiential techniques when educating returning adult students. If using traditional methods such as lecture or

assignments that emphasize memorization (e.g., multiple-choice quizzes or exams), incorporate nontraditional methods as well.

3. Gain awareness of the challenges that returning adult students tend to face and determine how best to address those challenges, whether it be by modifying assignments to make them more manageable, being more lenient with deadlines, and/or developing flexible attendance policies. Maintain rigor while being adaptable.
4. Take the time to speak to their returning adult students, gathering background information in order to gain a better understanding of the individual students in the class, and allow it to inform their teaching approaches and curriculum development.
5. Review the results of formal course evaluations and search for trends in comments in order to determine what is and isn't working for returning adult students. In cases where the results of formal course evaluations are unavailable, develop evaluative (informal or formal) methods to gather suggestions, concerns, and general comments from returning adult students.
6. Consult with colleagues with more experience with returning adult students when unsure of the best course of action to take when feeling uncertain.

### **Recommendations for Satellite Campus Administrators**

All of the participants who taught on satellite campuses shared a challenge they faced that was unique to teaching on that campus type. There are some issues that can be addressed by faculty, but there are other issues that could best be resolved or even



prevented by administrators. When certain opportunities (e.g. professional development, sufficient support services, equal treatment) are provided by the administration then faculty are able to thrive. The recommendations that follow are derived from the interview responses of those who teach/taught on satellite campuses.

Satellite campus administrators should:

1. Ensure that both the faculty and staff are diverse to reflect the student population.
2. Treat the faculty on all campuses equally; provide them with a space to store materials and their personal items. Also, ensure that faculty (both adjunct and full-time) have access to formal course evaluations.
3. Include a mandatory workshop or in-service in adult learning to all new faculty members as a part of orientation.
4. Provide faculty with opportunities for professional development in adult learning on a regular basis to allow them to stay current on the literature and effective teaching approaches.
5. Offer support services on campus to address the various barriers that returning adult students encounter. In addition, offer workshops and webinars as well to address barriers. Topics that should be included are: time management, study skills, financial management, and health & wellness.
6. Maintain the same level of support services (e.g., career, counseling, financial) that are available on the main campus. This allows students to have access to everything they need on the campus they attend instead of being required to in many cases travel to the main campus especially when time has been mentioned as a challenge.

7. Have flexibility in the hours that support services are available to students.

Realizing that returning adult students have multiple roles, there may be a need to have extended or varied hours on various days for students to for example utilize the testing center or receive counseling. In addition, ensure that events are held on varied days and hours on the satellite campus in order to provide returning adult students the opportunity to attend and feel like a part of the college community.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

After analyzing the findings from this study this researcher found that there were quite a few questions and topics that warrant further exploration in future research. The following is recommended:

1. Based on the limitations of this current study, this research should be replicated with a larger sample of faculty.
2. If a similar study is conducted in the future it would be valuable to also survey the returning adult students of the faculty to obtain a broader picture of not only the teaching approaches utilized, but also how the students perceive them (i.e. effective or ineffective).
3. In order to ensure credibility, similar studies in the future should utilize *prolonged engagement*. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define *prolonged engagement* as spending sufficient time in the field to learn or understand the culture, social setting, or phenomenon of interest. This involves spending adequate time observing various aspects of a setting, speaking with a range of people, and developing relationships

and rapport with members of the culture. Development of rapport and trust facilitates understanding and co-construction of meaning between researcher and members of a setting. Lincoln and Guba state that the observer should be there long enough to: become oriented to the situation so that the context is appreciated and understood; be able to detect and account for distortions that might be in the data; rise above his or her own preconceptions; and build trust.

4. Satellite campuses consist almost entirely (at times entirely) of returning adult students. This research attempted to shed light on satellite campuses, which it did, but there is a need to add more research that focuses on satellite campuses to adult learning literature, preferably some that focus on eliminating or resolving the challenges of returning adult students (also referred to as barriers). Additionally, it would be valuable to find out more about the characteristics of the faculty who teach on satellite campuses compared to those who teach on the main campus. Are they more learner centered? Do they have an interest in teaching returning adult students or a commitment to adult learning?
5. This researcher found that there appeared to be a shift in how faculty perceive and teach returning adult students. It seems to have moved from negative to positive. Future studies should examine this further; has there been a shift or is this change only present with faculty who teach on satellite campuses and community college faculty who tend to have a larger population of returning adult students? Would this same shift be seen if the focus was on faculty who teach returning adult students on the main campus of a large research university? In other words, does

the campus type matter when examining how faculty perceive returning adult students?

6. Within this research a few participants mentioned personal challenges that they faced when educating returning adult students. This included a younger faculty member whom due to her cultural background struggled with addressing students older than her by their first names and an older faculty member who had never been married and had no children, which made him feel less credible to teach parenting to returning adult students. In future research it would be interesting to explore what personal challenges (if any) faculty perceive when trying to meet the needs of returning adult students. Do younger faculty have similar challenges due to their cultural background? How do faculty handle having knowledge of a subject scholarly, but not experientially?
7. An unexpected finding in this research involved some faculty of color stating that their race (and in some cases gender as well) influenced their teaching approaches and how they adapted to their returning adult students. The researcher did not probe more when interviewing faculty of color, but a question that should be asked in future research is, “How do faculty of color learn to adapt to the presence of returning adult students who are racist towards them?” Other topics that warrant further research are: how race can influence teaching approaches with returning adult students and how race can impact course evaluations.
8. This study had what seemed like two distinct groups of participants: faculty from the satellite campuses of four-year institutions and community college faculty who identified as having taught (or currently teaching) a course where returning

adult students were the majority in the classroom. However, in the current study, the responses from participants were extremely similar, so much so that it at times was difficult to distinguish who came from which group. The reasoning behind the lack of differences between the two groups should be explored (or if replicated with a larger sample maybe more differences will arise).

### **Researcher Reflections**

*“So often you find that the students you’re trying to inspire are the ones that end up inspiring you.”*

*-Sean Jenkins*

When I look back over the journey of conducting this research study I find myself reflecting on my multiple social roles and my experience teaching on a satellite campus. I began this research study as a full-time faculty member on the main campus of a private university and I conclude it as a full-time faculty member at a community college on two site campuses (or satellite campuses). I also realized with every step of this research process that I’m also an adult learner. I am juggling teaching full-time with attending school and being a wife and mother. With that said, I have empathy for the participants in this study who took time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences with me. I appreciate that they allowed me the opportunity to tell their stories.

I also empathize with their returning adult students who many times are struggling with barriers of different kinds, yet still remain determined to be successful in the classroom and earn a degree. I hope that this research shed light on the various challenges that returning adult students face and the dedication that faculty on satellite campuses have to help their students succeed despite in some cases not being treated equally to the

faculty on the main campus, having insufficient support services on campus to refer students to, and no personal space/office to store their materials or even their personal items.

I taught on the satellite campus of a four-year private institution for several years and the students were all returning adult students. As I listened to the experiences of participants I was reminded of what I endured as an adjunct faculty member there: buying paper so my students could print, not being notified that I could access my course evaluations after the semester had ended, no space other than my classroom, and insufficient student support services just to name a few. Some of my students were earning their GED and bachelor's degree at the same time so I had to address academic challenges. The population evolved over the years, but early on most of my students were: battling addiction, homeless, victims of domestic violence, or struggling with mental health issues. The turnover with faculty was high. Most would use the satellite campus as a way to gain teaching experience and leave after only one semester. I can remember one year being told by my department head that I had been in that department longer than any other adjunct she had hired.

So, knowing all of this, why would anyone choose to stay and teach on a satellite campus for several years? The short answer for me (and I believe many of my participants) is the students. They deserve to be educated by faculty who want to be there and who want to see them succeed. There is nothing more rewarding than watching a 65-year-old grandmother graduate with her bachelor's degree after being away from school for over 40 years. My wish is that this research study and research studies like this will allow others to learn more about the faculty and returning adult students on the satellite

campuses. My hope is that this research will open a door to more research studies that focus on satellite campuses and eventually this will translate into actual improvements being made not only for the faculty, but also for the returning adult students they serve.

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Announcement: Facebook

Greetings Colleagues:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am currently working on a qualitative study called “Exploring the Teaching Approaches Utilized by Educators of Returning Adult Students on Satellite Campuses and Community College Campuses: To What Extent Do Faculty Change Their Teaching Approaches to Meet the Needs of the Adult Learner?”

Your participation is essential to the success of this study. As a fellow faculty member you have valuable expertise and understanding of this topic.

In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

a) Faculty member (adjunct or full-time) from the field of Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, or Anthropology) who at some point in time had to make the shift from teaching traditional students (recent high school graduates) on a main campus of a 4 year institution to teaching returning adult students (adults 25 & over returning to college or starting for the first time) on a satellite campus (remote or branch campus) of a 4 year institution. If you teach at both campuses currently, that is also acceptable b) The teaching experience mentioned in “a” was in a face to face setting not online and c) you must identify as someone who has either changed or not changed your teaching approaches when educating returning adult students.

***If you do not fit these criteria, but know someone who does, I would greatly appreciate your forwarding of this message to that person.***

If you meet the above criteria for this study, participation involves:

1. Completing a consent form and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study, which will include the audio recording of an interview.
2. Providing me with a copy of your course syllabus (with all identifying information removed) via email.
3. Participating in a telephone or Skype interview with me on an agreed upon day and time that will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

I would really like to hear about your experiences! If this study is of interest to you, please send me a private message via Facebook or contact me at the number and/or email listed below. I will be sure to respond at my earliest convenience.

For your participation, you will be provided with a copy of the research findings.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at amm2214@tc.columbia.edu or via phone at 347-346-1110. Thank you in advance for considering participation.

Cordially,

Antija M. Moore  
 Doctoral Candidate in Adult Learning and Leadership  
 Teachers College, Columbia University  
 Institutional Review Board Protocol # 16-375

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Announcement: LinkedIn

Greetings Colleagues:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am currently working on a qualitative study called “Exploring the Teaching Approaches Utilized by Educators of Returning Adult Students on Satellite Campuses and Community College Campuses: To What Extent Do Faculty Change Their Teaching Approaches to Meet the Needs of the Adult Learner?”

Your participation is essential to the success of this study. As a fellow faculty member you have valuable expertise and understanding of this topic.

In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

a) Faculty member (adjunct or full-time) from the field of Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, or Anthropology) who at some point in time had to make the shift from teaching traditional students (recent high school graduates) on a main campus of a 4 year institution to teaching returning adult students (adults 25 & over returning to college or starting for the first time) on a satellite campus (remote or branch campus) of a 4 year institution. If you teach at both campuses currently, that is also acceptable b) The teaching experience mentioned in “a” was in a face to face setting not online and c) you must identify as someone who has either changed or not changed your teaching approaches when educating returning adult students.

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If you meet the above criteria for this study, participation involves:

1. Completing a consent form and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study, which will include the audio recording of an interview.
2. Providing me with a copy of your course syllabus (with all identifying information removed) via email.
3. Participating in a telephone or Skype interview with me on an agreed upon day and time that will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

I would really like to hear about your experiences! If this study is of interest to you, please send me a private message via LinkedIn or contact me at the number and/or email listed below. I will be sure to respond at my earliest convenience.

For your participation, you will be provided with a copy of the research findings.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at amm2214@tc.columbia.edu or via phone at 347-346-1110. Thank you in advance for considering participation.

Cordially,  
Antija M. Moore  
Doctoral Candidate in Adult Learning and Leadership  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
Institutional Review Board Protocol # 16-375

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Announcement: TC Message Center

Greetings Colleagues:

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am currently working on a qualitative study called “Exploring the Teaching Approaches Utilized by Educators of Returning Adult Students on Satellite Campuses and Community College Campuses: To What Extent Do Faculty Change Their Teaching Approaches to Meet the Needs of the Adult Learner?”

Your participation is essential to the success of this study. As a fellow faculty member you have valuable expertise and understanding of this topic.

In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

a) Faculty member (adjunct or full-time) from the field of Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, or Anthropology) who at some point in time had to make the shift from teaching traditional students (recent high school graduates) on a main campus of a 4 year institution to teaching returning adult students (adults 25 & over returning to college or starting for the first time) on a satellite campus (remote or branch campus) of a 4 year institution. If you teach at both campuses currently, that is also acceptable b) The teaching experience mentioned in “a” was in a face to face setting not online and c) you must identify as someone who has either changed or not changed your teaching approaches when educating returning adult students.

***If you do not fit these criteria, but know someone who does, I would greatly appreciate your forwarding of this message to that person.***

If you meet the above criteria for this study, participation involves:

1. Completing a consent form and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study, which will include the audio recording of an interview.
2. Providing me with a copy of your course syllabus (with all identifying information removed) via email.
3. Participating in a telephone or Skype interview with me on an agreed upon day and time that will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

I would really like to hear about your experiences! If this study is of interest to you, please contact me at the number and/or email listed below. I will be sure to respond at my earliest convenience.

For your participation, you will be provided with a copy of the research findings.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at amm2214@tc.columbia.edu or via phone at 347-346-1110. Thank you in advance for considering participation.

Cordially,  
Antija M. Moore  
Doctoral Candidate in Adult Learning and Leadership  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
Institutional Review Board Protocol # 16-375



## Appendix D

### Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

### INFORMED CONSENT

**Protocol Title:** Exploring the Teaching Approaches Utilized by Educators of Returning Adult Students on Satellite Campuses and Community College Campuses

**Subtitle:** To What Extent Do Faculty Change Their Teaching Approaches to Meet the Needs of the Adult Learner?

**Principal Investigator:** Antija Moore 347-346-1110

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Exploring the Teaching Approaches Utilized by Educators of Returning Adult Students on Satellite Campuses and Community College Campuses: To What Extent Do Faculty Change Their Teaching Approaches to Meet the Needs of the Adult Learner?” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are a faculty member from the field of Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, or Anthropology) who at some point in time had to make the shift from teaching traditional students on a main campus of a 4 year institution to teaching returning adult students on a satellite campus of a 4 year institution. The teaching experience you have had was in a face to face setting and you have stated that you either have or have not changed your teaching approaches when educating returning adult students. Approximately twenty people will participate in this study and it will take between 60-90 minutes to complete.

#### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

This study is being done to determine to what extent, if at all, faculty change their teaching approaches when educating returning adult students and how their approaches and experiences align with adult learning principles. This research will explore the teaching approaches of 20 Behavioral Science (Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology) faculty members from 4 year institutions who either previously taught traditional students (student who recently graduated from high school) on a main campus and currently teach returning adult students (adults age 25 and over returning to college or attending for the first time) on a satellite campus (also known as a remote or branch campus) or who are currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus.

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New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator via telephone or a video call tool such as Skype. During the interview you will be asked to discuss your experience as a faculty member of returning adults students on a satellite campus. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is transcribed the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes depending on the length of your responses. You will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep your identity confidential.

Prior to your interview you will be asked to provide a copy of a course syllabus via email. You are encouraged to redact the syllabus to remove any identifying or other information that you do not feel comfortable sharing with the principal investigator. The syllabus will only be viewed by the principal investigator and a copy will not be included in the research findings. It will be used to provide context for your interview responses and during the interview you may be asked to elaborate on some aspects of the syllabus such as class exercises or class activities listed.

### **WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in a professional discussion. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

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525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of adult education to better understand the teaching approaches used with returning adult students on satellite campuses.

### **WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not be paid to participate. There are no financial costs to you for taking part in this study.

### **WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?**

The study is over when you have completed the interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.

### **PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY**

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be transcribed and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years.

### **HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?**

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

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 New York NY 10027  
 212 678 3000

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING**

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_ I give my consent to be recorded \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

\_\_\_ I **do not** consent to be recorded \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

### **WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY**

\_\_\_ I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

\_\_\_ I **do not** consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature

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525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT**

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
Initial Initial

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525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

**If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Antija Moore, at 347-346-1110 or at [amm2214@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:amm2214@tc.columbia.edu). You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Lyle Yorks at 212-678-3820.**

**If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email [IRB@tc.edu](mailto:IRB@tc.edu). Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.**

---

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

### **PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS**

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion if it turns out my experience is not relevant to the research questions or if you are not comfortable with the questions.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

**My signature means that I agree to participate in this study**

**Print name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol

#### **Part I: Background**

- 1) What is your current title?
- 2) Are you currently teaching returning adult students on a satellite campus? If not, when was the last time you taught returning adult students on a satellite campus?
- 3) When you taught returning adult students, was this as an adjunct or as a full-time faculty member?
- 4) Did you previously teach traditional students and are currently teaching returning adult students? Or are you currently teaching traditional students on a main campus and returning adult students on a satellite campus?
- 5) How long have you taught returning adult students?
- 6) How long have you taught undergraduates?

#### **Part II: Educating Returning Adult Students on a Satellite Campus**

- 7) Does the satellite campus environment have any effect on the manner in which you teach (i.e. Does it pose any unique challenges when educating returning adult students)?
  - 7a) If yes, please explain and provide examples.
- 8) Do you believe that returning adult students should be taught in the same manner that faculty would teach a traditional student? Explain.
  - 8a) If yes, how did/do you learn to adapt to the needs of returning adult students? Think back to your earlier teaching experiences, what led you to what you're currently doing? Did you speak to colleagues or seek out other resources?



- 8b) (If not already mentioned) Please provide examples of adult learning resources that you use (if any). For example, attendance at workshops focused on adult learning, reading journal articles on adult learning theory, and/or membership in an online group/professional association focused on adult learning.
- 9) Think of a course that you taught on a satellite campus to returning adult students. When you taught that course, what challenges (if any) did you perceive? Please provide examples.
- 9a) How (if at all) did you try to address these challenges?
- 9b) What guided your thinking when trying to address the challenges?
- 10) When making the shift from teaching traditional students to educating returning adults do/did you change your teaching approaches? Please explain why or why not.
- 11) Now I'm going to ask you about the teaching approaches you utilized (or utilize) when educating returning adults students on a satellite campus. It might be helpful to base your responses off of one course you have taught instead of various courses. I'll read you a list of teaching methods/approaches and I want you to answer based on a scale of 1-4. 1 meaning this is a teaching practice you *never* use, 2 meaning this is a practice you have used *rarely*, 3 meaning this is a practice you use *often*, and 4 meaning this is a practice you *always* use. Please keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers.
- 11a) Group discussion
- 11b) Role-play
- 11c) Lecture
- 11d) Ask students to share examples from personal experience

11e) Project-based learning

11f) PowerPoint or some other form of presentation slides

11g) Cooperative learning

11h) Treat students like experts

11i) Require students to memorize terms, concepts, and/or theories.

11j) Case Methods

11k) Simulation exercises

11l) Allow students to direct their own learning

11m) Please provide examples of other teaching approaches that you utilize sometimes or always with returning adult students that I have not already listed.

12) *(The interviewer will then probe using the responses from question number 11. For example, tell me more about your decision to always use lecture and PowerPoint slides).* How do you decide on which teaching approaches to utilize?

13) Do you evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching approaches that you use with returning adult students? If so, how?

14) ) Are you able to review the results of your course evaluations?

14a) If yes, what aspects of the course evaluation do you pay most attention to and why?

14b) In your course evaluation feedback, what have students said they liked *most* about the course and/or your teaching approaches and what have students said they liked *least* about the course and/or your teaching approaches?

14c) Have you ever modified your teaching approaches as a result of course evaluations?

14d) If yes, please provide an example.

15) *(Interviewer will request a redacted copy of the participant's syllabus prior to the interview. At this point of the interview, the interviewer will ask the participant questions about the activities/class exercises listed on the syllabi that have not already been explained during the interview).*

16) Since I will not be able to observe you in the classroom, can you please provide me with an overall description of what the classroom setting for the course you provided me with a syllabus for would look like? Large or small class size? Approximately how many students? What is the classroom set-up: round tables and chairs, auditorium style, etc.?

16a) Who determines the classroom set-up?

17) Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your participation. Can I have permission to contact you in the near future to clarify anything we discussed today?